PATTERNS OF POWER · THE ASANTE EMPIRE

The Asante Empire

The Complete Study · 1701 — 1807 — 1901

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with Claude (Anthropic) · 2026

held as tested, not revealed

Held as tested, not revealed.

A case study in the Patterns of Power series.
Primary sources quoted exactly; modern scholarship paraphrased and credited.
Contested figures given as ranges. Nothing reconstructed from memory.

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Preface and Outline

What the study is for, how it was built, and the discipline it holds

The spine

This collection holds twelve African studies and every one of them is a colony.

That is a defect in the instrument, and it is the reason this study exists. A framework that has examined Algeria, Kenya, Northern Nigeria, Somalia and their neighbours, and has found the same shapes recurring in all of them, has established something about *colonies*. Whether it has established anything about *conquest* depends on a comparison it has never been able to make: an African state, on African ground, built by African conquest, with no metropole, no settlers, no racial ideology, no distant taxpayer, and no European anywhere in its chain of command.

Asante is that control group. It was founded in 1701 by a forest chief who threw off a tribute-empire that had itself been nothing two generations earlier. It ran for two centuries. It conquered most of the forest and a broad belt of savanna beyond it, took tribute from Muslim kingdoms four hundred miles from its capital, supplied one of the largest slave markets in the world, maintained eight highways and a treasury without a line of writing, beat every neighbour it ever fought, and killed a British governor in the field in 1824. Europeans were on that coast in stone forts for two hundred and nineteen years before it existed, and could not walk five days inland without guides.

So the organising question, held from the outset, is exact: **which features of the colonial African cases were colonial, and which were simply what a state on that ground did?**

The answer is sharper than expected and the line does not run where anyone would put it. Indirect rule turns out not to be colonial at all — Bowdich describes it in Asante in 1819, a century before Lugard was born, in almost the same words. The complexity variable is not colonial: Asante ruled through the organised Muslim states of the north and harvested the stateless peoples beyond them, with no European involved in the decision. Terror in place of policing, roads built as surveillance, an army made out of the conquered, slavery on an enormous scale — none of it colonial.

But the legal fiction of the settlement is absent here, and so is caste-sorted extraction, and the withheld formation runs backwards: this order formed its

conquered aggressively and admitted them by statute, on pain of death for anyone who mentioned their origin. And every one of those divergences traces to the same missing thing. **The colonial bend is not a bend produced by conquest. It is a bend produced by having to render an account to somebody who is not there.** Remove the metropole and the fictions, the registers, the categories and the withheld formation all disappear, while the conquest, the extraction and the killing remain exactly where they were.

The consequence is uncomfortable in both directions, and the study states it rather than managing it. A conquest that answers to nobody is not gentler; it simply leaves no file. The statutes, Blue Books and annual reports that make colonial rule so legible are artefacts of accountability, not of cruelty — which means every comparison anyone draws between colonial and indigenous conquest is measuring, in part, the survival rate of paper.

How it was built

One module at a time, verification first, over the arc the Field Manual sets out: a landscape and twelve modules, each with a framework function, each obliged to contribute a revision or a refinement back to the framework rather than merely applying it.

Public-domain primary sources are quoted **exactly**, at the length the argument needs. Four carry most of the weight and each is compromised in a different way, which is stated on the face of every module that uses them. Willem Bosman was chief merchant of the Dutch West India Company at Elmina and wrote within months of the founding war, from what he says plainly was second-hand report, for a company that armed both sides. T. E. Bowdich spent five months in Kumasi in 1817 as agent of a company negotiating for a power that would later invade. Joseph Dupuis was British consul there in 1820 and published a case against his own superiors. Carl Christian Reindorf was a Ga, a Basel Mission pastor, and a Gold Coast African writing African traditions down in 1895 — under British rule, on the eve of annexation, from the memories of peoples Asante had repeatedly invaded.

Modern copyrighted scholarship is paraphrased and credited, never quoted at length. Where wording or provenance could not be confirmed, the line was dropped rather than guessed. Contested figures are given as ranges, and there are a great many of them.

Where the study failed to obtain something, it says so. Bosman's report of above a hundred thousand dead at Feyiase is rejected as a battlefield count and retained only as evidence of contemporary impression. The date of the founding battle cannot be fixed

within the year. The Elmina note's transfer in 1701 is contested and is treated as a claim rather than an event. No aggregate is offered for ritual killings, for the wars of expansion, or for the civil war of 1883–88, because none can be supported.

And one limitation runs under everything and cannot be fixed. This order kept its records in drums, stools, oaths and the trained memories of officeholders; its founding statute made it a capital offence to say where a man's people had been conquered from; and the officeholders were deported in 1896. What has been reconstructed here is what an order looked like from outside it, by men who were selling to it, negotiating with it, or writing after it had been destroyed.

The discipline

Legibility is not pardon.

To explain why a state with no garrisons dissolved the category of the conquered by statute, why an unpaid army had to be paid in captives, and why a tribute assessed by endowment turned into an annual man-hunt four hundred miles from the capital, is to describe a mechanism and not to excuse it. Equally, a study that cannot credit what an order actually did has stopped measuring anything. Asante had a graduated law of oaths, an appellate right that let a provincial subject go over his own ruler's head, a statute limiting requisition by the state's own servants with a penalty attached, and a constitutional procedure that removed three sovereigns in a century. All of that is on the record and all of it is set down.

So is the rest: the five hundred people a year owed by each large town of Gonja and Dagomba, the peoples beyond them who were not subjects and were owed nothing, the twenty thousand captives whose disposal an Asantehene described to a foreign envoy in three clauses, and the skulls of every defeated king carried through the capital once a year.

Both columns stand. Neither cancels the other. Carrying both at once is the whole of the method.

The arithmetic is laid out. The sum is left to the reader.

The arc

Landscape · A Small Compass of Land. The ground before the founding — gold under trees that no European could reach, clans older than any state on the map, and a tribute-empire that a Dutch merchant, writing months before its destruction, described as having been a small place with few people inside living memory.

1 · I Joined the Campaign, But Never Heard of It. *The floor of force.* A tributary town beat its own neighbours first, bought powder on credit against pledged people, destroyed its overlord — and then made it a capital offence to remember any of it.

2 · Heir to the Gold of Every Subject. *The settlement.* Who got what, and the rule that ensured no fortune outlived the man who made it. The founding conferred one hereditary privilege; a century later four men held it, and all four were beggars.

3 · Constructed and Carved. *The robe.* The object that turned a war coalition into a nation, dated against the acts it covers — and the treasure the king was forbidden to look at.

4 · There Is a Gloomy Silence. *Formation.* A state with nothing to write on: the calendar that scored the year, an archive made of bone and paraded annually, and a courtroom in which the most effective oath available was the one nobody would swear.

5 · Received as a Free Subject. *The cost column.* Why an ordinary man complied in a country he could have walked out of in a morning — run separately for the nine populations who paid, including the ones who were not subjects at all.

6 · The People Buy Gold and Ivory Only. *Extraction.* Seven heads of revenue, a tribute schedule that is a map of which populations were destroyed, and the year the empire reached its market and the market closed.

7 · I Must Have the Books. *Information and suppression.* An illiterate sovereign who refused pots of gold and demanded the written notes instead — and a censorship apparatus pointed not at the ruled but at the men with retinues.

8 · Four Captains Controuling the King. *Elite coordination and the default.* Why men who disliked each other held it up for two centuries, what the apex did to escape them, and how that escape silently forked the constitution in two.

9 · One Meal, and One Meal Only. *Plurality or foreclosure.* An order with no charter, no rhetoric of liberty and a number of real protections — none of them won by the people they protected.

10 · The Road Shall Always Be Kept Open. *Change and collapse.* Three popular actions that changed nothing, one elite fracture that changed everything, and a restoration granted by the men who had abolished it.

11 · Many, Moreover, Died. *The grim accounting.* Why the battle column is the smallest, why the metabolic note was never called at the end, and what it means that a state which sells people exports its death toll.

12 · Do Not the White Kings Act Like This? *Convergence and divergence.* The question an Asantehene put to a British consul in 1820, and what is left of the colonial bend once the metropole is removed. The strongest case against this study, stated in full, and answered.

LANDSCAPE

A Small Compass of Land

The ground before Feyiase — what the forest gave and what it withheld, the clans no state had made, and the tribute-empire of Denkyira, which two generations earlier had been nothing at all

Why this case is read without a second shore

Every study in this collection opens by reconstructing the ground a conquest fell on, because a conquest performed upon empty scenery cannot be read at all: you have to know who held the means of violence, how the wealth was already divided, and what the population had been formed to think was rightful, before you can say what the conquerors actually did. The colonial cases in this collection double that requirement and reconstruct two grounds — the land invaded and the land that invaded it — because a colonial governor answers to an audience the conquered will never see, and the distance between what he does on one shore and what is said about it on the other is the working principle of the whole enterprise.

This case has no second shore, and that absence is the reason for choosing it. There were Europeans on this coast, in stone forts, for two hundred and nineteen years before the battle this study begins from, and they belong in the landscape as surely as the gold does. But they were not a party to what happened in the forest. They were a market with cannon: competing companies, on sufferance, renting ground from African landlords, unable to walk five days inland without guides, and quite unable to reach the mines whose product they had crossed an ocean to buy. Willem Bosman, chief merchant of the Dutch West India Company at Elmina and the best contemporary witness to the founding, put the position to his correspondent without flattery — *There is no small number of Men in Europe who believe that the Gold Mines are in our Power; that we, like the Spaniards in the West-Indies, have no more to do but to work them by our Slaves: Though you perfectly know we have no manner of access to these Treasures; nor do I believe that any of our people have ever seen one of them.* The forts sold powder and bought captives and gold. They did not govern, they did not extract, and nobody in the forest needed their good opinion. So there is one landscape here, with the coast running through it as a price and a supply line, which is what it was.

What has to be established, then, is a single ground: the material position of the forest, the older order lying across it that no conquest had made and none could

unmake, and the particular tribute-empire that a cluster of small states was about to overthrow. The last of these is the one that repays the closest reading, because it is not what the shape of the story suggests. The conqueror in this case did not throw off an ancient overlord. He threw off a parvenu.

The ground: gold under the trees, and nothing that walks

Begin with what the country produced, because it fixes almost everything downstream.

The forest belt of what is now southern Ghana is a high-rainfall evergreen and semi-deciduous zone running perhaps a hundred and fifty miles inland from the Atlantic before it thins into the savanna transition. It sits on gold. Alluvial and reef deposits are distributed widely through the Pra, Ofin and Birim basins and the country around Obuasi, worked by panning the streams and by digging shafts and pits, and they made this one of the three great gold sources of the western Sudan, alongside Bambuk and Bure on the upper Senegal and Niger. The forest also produced kola — a stimulant nut that will not grow in the savanna and was in permanent demand among the Muslim populations to the north, where alcohol was forbidden and kola was not — and it produced timber, palm oil and, later, wild rubber. What it did not produce was salt, which had to come from the sea or across the desert, or cloth, or metalware, or horses.

The horses matter most, and they matter by their absence. Trypanosomiasis, carried by the tsetse fly, makes the forest lethal to large livestock; no cavalry, no pack animals, no draught oxen, no ploughs. Nor are there navigable rivers running usefully inland; the Pra and the Volta are obstacles more often than highways. Everything that moved in this country moved on a human head, along a path cut through the trees and closing again within a season if it was not maintained. Bosman's servants took about five days to walk from Elmina to the Denkyira capital and above ten from Axim, and he was clear that the delay was not distance: *not so much on account of its real distance from either place, as because of the badness of the Roads, to a degree which frequently obliges them to go double the compass of Ground, that would otherwise be necessary.*

Three consequences follow, and they set the terms of every political choice in this study. First, there could be no steppe-style conquest here, no mounted aristocracy sweeping a plain, because the animal that makes such an aristocracy possible dies in this air. Armies were infantry, and an army was therefore only as large as the number of men who could be persuaded or compelled to walk. Second, because everything travelled on paths, control of the paths was control of the trade, and a path is an object a state can plausibly hold: it can be cut, watched, tolled, closed to strangers, and forbidden to the wrong people. A country of open plains cannot be closed. A forest with seven roads

out of its capital can. Third, and most consequentially, land in this country was worth very little on its own. There was far more of it than there were people to work it. The first census thought to come near reality, taken in 1921 and acknowledged even then to undercount, returned 406,640 people in colonial Asante at some seventeen to the square mile; fallow periods of fifteen to twenty years were normal outside the immediate environs of the capital. In such conditions a man who is dissatisfied does not have to overthrow anybody. He walks into the bush and clears a farm, and nobody can stop him by owning the ground, because the ground is not scarce.

The economic historian Gareth Austin has argued that nineteenth-century Asante is about as clean a case as exists of the proposition that where land is abundant and labour scarce, there can be no labour market without coercion: nobody works for another man unless something compels him, because the alternative — working for himself on land nobody is charging him for — is always available. That is not a moral observation. It is an arithmetical one, and it decides in advance what wealth in this country consists of. Wealth is people. A rich man here is not a man with many acres; he is a man with many dependants — wives, children, nephews and nieces, clients, pawns held against debts, and slaves bought from the north. Every institution this study will examine, from the settlement of the spoils to the shape of the extraction to the peculiar horror at the top of the funeral rites, runs off that single fact about the price of soil.

Two markets stood at either end of the country, and they were not equally old. The northern one came first by centuries. Wangara — Dyula — merchants out of the Mande world had been drawing Akan gold northward to the desert-edge entrepôts since at least the thirteenth or fourteenth century, and the towns that grew on the forest-savanna frontier to service that trade, Begho above all, along with Bono Manso and the settlements around Wenchi, were the earliest urban complexes in the region. They brought in brassware, cloth, cowries and beads, and they brought in something more durable: a system of weights for measuring gold dust, calibrated to Islamic standards, which the Akan took up and turned into an art. The southern market opened in 1471, when Portuguese ships reached this coast and found, as one modern summary has it, a gold economy already running. It did not replace the northern trade. For four centuries the two ran in parallel, and a state placed between them — with gold under it, kola around it, and a hand on the paths in both directions — would hold something worth holding.

The order no state had made

Before any of the states in this landscape existed, and outlasting all of them, there was a structure of descent that no conquest built and none could confiscate.

Akan society is organised by matrilineal clans — *abusua* — of which the standard reckoning gives eight, and membership passes from a mother to her children. Property, office and succession run through the female line, so that a man's heir is not his son but his sister's son. Thomas Edward Bowdich, writing up the first English mission to reach the Asante capital, recorded this in 1819 as a thing already reported to him as immemorial and, crucially, as a thing that ignored political borders entirely: the Ashantee, Warsaw, Fantee, Akim, Assin, Aquamboe and part of the Ahanta nations, he was told, *were originally comprehended in twelve tribes or families*, and he noted that they classed themselves in these families *still, without any regard to national distinction*, so that men of any of the nations before mentioned would each declare himself of the same family, and on meeting *salute each other as brothers*. His list of twelve does not match the modern list of eight and his etymologies are the guesses of a man working through interpreters, but the structural point is unmistakable and is confirmed by everything since: the clans crossed every frontier on the map, and a man in one kingdom had kin obligations to a man in a kingdom his own king was at war with.

Onto this ran the political architecture. The unit of authority was the *oman*, the town-and-its-lands, whose head, the *ohene*, sat on a stool. The stool is the load-bearing object of the whole system and it is easy to mistake for furniture. It is a carved seat that is also an office and also the seat of the ancestors who have occupied it; blackened at a chief's death and kept in a stool-house, it makes the succession of persons into a single continuing thing. A man does not inherit a stool, he is *enstooled* upon it, nominated from within the royal matrilineage by the queen mother and confirmed by the elders — and, the point that will matter enormously later, he can be taken off it again. Beneath and alongside the chiefs stood the *obirempon*, the big man: a wealthy commoner who had cleared forest, opened a gold pit, gathered dependants and accumulated enough to be recognised, whose standing came from what he had built rather than from whose sister's son he was.

The record of these things in the ground runs deep. Excavation at Asantemanso, near Essumeja and a little south of the later capital, shows continuous occupation from at least the ninth century, with iron-smelting and pottery, part of a network of forest and forest-fringe towns that included Begho and Bono Manso. Akan tradition treats Adanse, the country between the Pra and the Ofin, as the eldest of the states and the place where the founders of the others came from; it is named first in the traditional roll of the senior Akan polities. By the fifteenth century, families based in towns like Adansemanso and Asantemanso had grown rich on long-distance trade and had built something that looks like a small aristocracy of forest-clearing patrons.

Two disciplines apply here and they pull in opposite directions, which is why both have to be held. The first is that this substrate is not an aboriginal baseline either. It is the residue of earlier settlement, earlier clearance, earlier accumulation and earlier fighting, most of which is beyond recovery; there is no first innocent order anywhere in this landscape, only builds too old to see the seams in. The second is that naming a built origin is not debunking. The clans were the world. A man born into the Oyoko in 1660 did not hold a theory about matriliny; he had a mother's brother, and obligations, and a place, and the arrangement was as much a fact to him as the rain. That it was built by somebody, sometime, does not make it a fiction — it makes it a thing that was built and then became real, which is more durable than any lie and is precisely what a conqueror runs into when he tries to reorder a country.

Denkyira, and how quickly a permanent thing can be made

Now the order the conquest actually overthrew, which is the part of this landscape that is usually got wrong.

Denkyira originated as a small polity of the Agona clan, seated in the Adanse country and for a time subordinate to Adanse, with traditions that carry its founding lineages down from the Bono region in the north. It took its own name in the early seventeenth century, established its capital at Abankeseso in the Ofin basin, and for several decades was one Akan state among many. Then, in the middle of the century, it began to grow. It defeated Adanse — its own former overlord — in about 1659. It reduced Twifo, Assin, Wassa, Aowin and Sefwi. It reached across the goldfields of the Ofin and Pra basins and it reached south toward the coastal middlemen, and by the 1680s and 1690s it was the paramount power of the region and was taking tribute from a spread of small states to its north, among them a cluster of Oyoko towns around a place called Kwaman.

What made this possible was a change in how war was fought, and the change was recent. T. C. McCaskie's reconstruction of the period places a revolution in Akan warfare between roughly the 1650s and the 1680s: imported European muskets, paid for in gold and in captives, displaced bows and javelins, and the close-quarters mêlée gave way to gun-bearing infantry manoeuvring in named formations — a right wing, a left wing, a main body, a rear. Akwamu, away to the east on the Birim, was the first of the inland forest Akan to convert; Denkyira was the first in the Ofin–Pra basin to import firearms in volume and to fight the new way. The empire that looked so permanent in 1699 was, in the most literal sense, built on a weapons system its own grandfathers had not owned.

The best contemporary statement of how new all this was comes from the man at Elmina. Writing at the very end of Denkyira's life, Bosman describes it in a single sentence that ought to be set against every later account of an immemorial overlord: *This Country, formerly restrained to a small compass of Land, and containing but an inconsiderable number of Inhabitants, is, by their Valour, so improved in Power, that they are respected and honoured by all their Neighbouring Nations; all which they have taught to fear them, except Asiante and Akim, who are yet stronger than they.* A small compass of land and an inconsiderable number of inhabitants, within living memory. The Dutch had been in the castle at Elmina for sixty years and the Portuguese for a hundred and fifty-five before them when Denkyira began its rise. The fort was older than the empire by the length of two lifetimes.

And it behaved as a young empire behaves. Bosman, who had every commercial reason to be indulgent toward his best gold suppliers, was not: *Dinkira, elevated by its great Riches and Power, became so arrogant, that it looked on all other Negroes with a contemptible Eye, esteeming them no more than its Slaves; which rendred it the Object of their common Hatred, each impatiently wishing its downfal.* The Akan tradition, recorded much later, supplies the incidents that made the hatred concrete: a brass pan sent up to Kumasi to be filled to the brim with gold dust, and a demand that each tributary chief send his favourite wife to the Denkyira court. Those particular details come down through twentieth-century collections and cannot be verified as events; what can be said is that the tradition and the contemporary Dutch merchant agree entirely on the character of the thing, which is a form of corroboration worth having even where the incidents are not.

Here is the finding this landscape exists to establish. In 1701 Denkyira was, at the outside, two generations old as a power and perhaps forty years old as a hegemon. Yet to a man in Kwaman it was simply how the world was arranged. He had paid tribute all his life. His chief had paid tribute all *his* life, and had very probably been sent as a boy to be raised at Abankeseso, in the custom by which tributary heirs were educated and held as sureties in one motion. The alternative to Denkyira was not an option he had rejected; it was not present to him at all, until somebody put it there. Naturalisation, on this evidence, is not a function of elapsed years. Two generations of people who never knew otherwise is enough, provided the arrangement occupies the only visible route to everything that matters — and Denkyira sat astride the roads to the coast.

The coast: a market with cannon, and a trade that had run the other way

Which brings the Atlantic into the account at the place it belongs: as one of the materials at hand.

The Portuguese reached this coast in 1471 and built São Jorge da Mina at Elmina in 1482, on ground negotiated from a local ruler their chronicles call Caramansa; the Dutch West India Company took it by bombardment in 1637 and made it the headquarters of a Dutch Gold Coast that absorbed the remaining Portuguese posts by 1642. Around it, over two centuries, accumulated the densest chain of European fortification anywhere in Africa — Portuguese, Dutch, English, Danish, Swedish and Brandenburg posts strung along a few hundred miles of surf-bound shore, none of them more than a cannon-shot deep.

Every one of them was a tenant. They paid ground rents and stipends to the coastal authorities on whose land they sat, they hired local labour and local canoemen, and when they fought each other they hired African states to do it. Bosman records the Dutch, in a bad season of the Komenda wars, contracting with the Denkyirans for eight hundred pounds to take their side — and the Denkyirans taking the money, being distracted by a war of their own, and returning most of it, *except only a small quantity which stuck to the Fingers of their Messengers*. The direction of that transaction is the whole point: the coast was hiring the interior. Of his Brandenburg neighbours, whose officers were mostly Dutchmen, Bosman noted that in imitation of his own nation they *have always aimed at an absolute Dominion over the Blacks; but never could yet accomplish their End*. The ambition existed. In 1700 it was nowhere near realisation, and would not be for the better part of two centuries.

What the forts did supply, decisively, was firearms, and Bosman is unsparing about the mechanism. *Perhaps you wonder how the Negroes come to be furnished with Fire-Arms, but you will have no Reason when you know we sell them incredible quantities, thereby obliging them with a Knife to cut our own throats. But we are forced to it; for if we would not, they might be sufficiently stored with that Commodity by the English, Danes, and Brandenburghers.* No single European power could withhold, because five others would sell; competition among the suppliers is what put muskets into the forest, and it is why the arms market was open to whichever African state had gold. In the run-up to the war, Bosman records, the Asante king, *not being sufficiently stored with Gunpowder, he bought up great quantities on the Coast* — and the Denkyirans let his subjects carry it home through their own territory, *notwithstanding they knew very well it was only designed for their Destruction.*

The other thing to establish about this market is that its most notorious traffic had, for a long time, run in the opposite direction from the one everybody assumes. Through the sixteenth century the Gold Coast was a net *importer* of enslaved people. The Portuguese bought captives at Benin and shipped them up from São Tomé to Elmina to sell to Akan merchants, and they were paid in gold, because a forest economy short of hands and long on ground wanted labour badly enough to buy it with the metal Europe had come for. The reversal came with the American plantations and the rise of the English and Dutch carrying trades in the seventeenth century; by Bosman's day the flow had turned and the Gold Coast was selling. Nothing about the people at either end of this had changed. The price had changed. That is worth fixing at the outset of a study whose subject would later become one of the trade's substantial suppliers, because it is the plainest possible demonstration that the direction of a traffic is a fact about a market and not a fact about a national character — and because it forecloses, in advance, both of the sentimental readings this subject invites.

Finally, the coast had taken sides. Bowdich, in Kumasi in 1817, was told that the Denkyira king — he renders the name *Intim Dakarey* — had been so considerable a trader in slaves *that the Dutch Governor General paid him a monthly note from his own purse, and assisted him with two or three small cannons, and a few Europeans, on the eve of the Ashantee invasion*; and Bowdich adds, with the flat particularity that makes him valuable, that the guns were still there — *now placed as trophies in Coomassie, at the top of the street in which the Mission was quartered*. Whether a formal Dutch payment passed to the Asantehene by right of conquest in 1701, as later Asante claims held, is genuinely contested and will have to be handled carefully further on; documented Dutch payments to Kumasi have been traced only from the 1770s, and the instrument that actually became known as the Elmina note was issued in 1818. What is not contested is that Denkyira had a Dutch subsidy and Dutch cannon, and lost anyway.

Kwaman, and the men who owed

Set against all this, the position of the states that were about to move is unremarkable, which is why it is worth stating precisely.

North of Denkyira, within a radius of roughly thirty miles of the site of the future capital, lay a scatter of small Akan towns settled by Oyoko and related lineages who had come up out of the Adanse–Amansie country in the preceding generations — Kwaman, Dwaben, Kokofu, Bekwai, Nsuta, Mampon, Kumawu, Asumegya, Offinso and others, with older communities such as Tafo, Kaase and Amakom already in place around them. They shared a language, a clan system, a neighbourhood and an overlord. They were not one people and there was no Asante nation; the name attaches to

nothing before this period. Kwaman itself had been built up by the Oyoko chief Oti Akenten and was held, from about 1660 to about 1680, by Obiri Yeboa, who was killed in a war with Dormaa — a quarrel that tradition traces to a dispute over an elephant, which is the sort of detail traditions do not invent.

His successor, his sister's son, is the man the study begins from. Osei Tutu had spent time at the Denkyira court, in the ward-and-hostage arrangement described above, and then at Akwamu, the eastern state that had converted first to the new gunpowder warfare. He came back with the Akwamu military system — the wings and the main body and the rear guard, and reportedly with Akwamu advisers and an escort — and with the two things a conqueror in this landscape needed: knowledge of how the overlord actually worked, acquired inside its own capital, and a template for an army, acquired from its most successful rival. Whether he also brought a priest named Anokye, and what that priest did at Kwaman, is a question the study will come to in its own place and under its own evidence.

The last word on the position belongs to Bosman, and it is a single clause. Listing the gold countries in about 1700, he mentions a new one: *Asiante is a convincing Proof of this, which being but lately known to us, we find to afford more Gold than Dinkira.* Lately known. Bowdich, a century later, cross-checked the Asante chronology his hosts gave him against exactly this and found it held: the Muslim scholars at the court reckoned the kingdom about a hundred and ten years old, and, he noted, *Bosman and Barbot mention the Ashantees, as just heard of by Europeans, about the year 1700, which confirms this account.* The state that would fight the leading industrial power of the nineteenth century to a standstill for the better part of a century enters the European record at the exact moment it becomes worth writing down — as a source of gold, mentioned in passing, by a merchant listing his suppliers.

What happened next took two campaigns and left the country between them in a condition Bosman, writing a few months after, described as desolate and waste. The plunder took the victors fifteen days to carry off, or so he was told. As to the toll, he passes on what he heard without endorsing it — *The Negroes report, that in these two Battles above a hundred thousand Men were killed* — a figure that must be treated as a coastal rumour rather than a count, and which will be dealt with, along with the rest of the arithmetic, in its place. His closing image is the one to end a landscape on, because it states the reversal without a word of comment: *Thus you see the towring Pride of Dinkira in Ashes, they being forced to fly before those, whom they not long before thought no better than their Slaves, and themselves being now sold for Slaves.*

Reading the ground against the framework

Three things this landscape establishes, of which one is a genuine refinement and two are constraints the later modules will have to work inside.

The refinement concerns how long it takes for a built order to become the furniture of reality. The working assumption across this collection has been that the naturalising of a conquest is slow — that it takes the compounding of many generations before the arrangement stops being a thing that was done and becomes simply how the world is, and that the deepest orders in the record are deep because they were left alone for centuries. Denkyira falsifies the timetable without disturbing the mechanism. It was a small place with few people inside living memory; it became a hegemon in perhaps forty years on the strength of a weapons system its grandfathers had not owned; and by 1699 the men paying its tribute had no working conception of an alternative. What did the work was not elapsed time but the number of formed generations who never saw anything else, multiplied by the completeness with which the arrangement occupied the only visible route to what mattered. Two generations sufficed, because Denkyira sat on the roads. The sharper statement is therefore that naturalisation is a function of the *field of the visible* rather than of the calendar: an order becomes the way the world is at the speed with which it can make every alternative to itself unimaginable, and a monopoly of the paths does that faster than a century of quiet does. This has a corollary the collection should carry forward. Where an order's grip on the visible depends on holding a physical chokepoint, its naturalisation is correspondingly shallow — real, but reversible the moment someone demonstrates the chokepoint can be gone around. Osei Tutu's gunpowder came up the roads Denkyira controlled, through Denkyira's own territory, with Denkyira's knowledge. The order that had made itself the only way through was destroyed by a shipment it declined to stop.

The first constraint is the substrate. A conqueror in this landscape could take the stools, redirect the tribute, and re-source every title in the country, but he could not touch the clans, because the clans were not the property of any state and ran through all of them. Matrilineal descent decided who could hold what and who inherited from whom; it was older than every polity on the map and crossed every border on it; and it meant that a man's obligations were never fully enclosed by any king's jurisdiction. Whatever settlement follows a conquest here has to be made *through* that structure rather than over it — which is a materially different starting position from the cases in this collection where a conqueror could convert a relation between persons into a transferable thing and hand it out. Where the deepest relation in the society is a descent group with no assets to convert, that instrument is simply not available.

The second constraint is the price of soil, and it settles a question the framework normally treats as a choice. The extraction available to a conquest depends on whether the thing worth taking is a flow that can be tuned or a stock that must be seized whole, and orders that take the ground itself tend toward clearing the people off it while orders that take a surplus need the people alive and producing. In this landscape that fork does not have to be chosen, because land at fifteen to twenty years of fallow is worth almost nothing without hands to work it. Dispossession is not merely cruel here; it is pointless. The scarce factor, and therefore the object of the whole apparatus of tribute, war, debt and law that follows, is people — and an order whose wealth consists of dependants will build institutions for acquiring, holding, pledging and inheriting them, and will find, when a distant market opens that also wants people, that it already possesses every instrument required to supply it.

On periodisation, the study will run **1701 · 1807 · 1874 · 1901**, with a coda to 1935. Feyiase founds it. 1807 is the sharpest hinge in the case and deserves its place for a reason that is almost too neat: it is the year Asante finally reached the sea and broke the coastal middlemen, and the year the British Parliament voted away the market it had reached the sea to serve. 1874 is separate work and cannot be folded into 1807 — Kumasi burned, the tributaries seceded, the northern entrepôt rebelled, and the fiscal crisis that followed produced an overthrow from inside. 1901 closes the independent order; 1935, when the Confederacy was restored and the office the British had abolished was recognised again, complicates the word collapse in a way the ending will have to earn. There is a fifth date with no external cause at all — the reorganisation of central government from the 1760s, over which the scholarship is still arguing — and it belongs where the argument about the apex belongs, not here.

A note on sources. The exact quotations from Willem Bosman are taken from the 1705 English translation of his *Nauwkeurige beschryving van de Guinese Goud- Tand- en Slavekust* (Utrecht, 1704), read in the digitised text of the London edition; the long *s* of the original has been rendered as *s* and the spelling, capitalisation and wording are otherwise unaltered. Bosman is a contemporary of the events he describes, was chief merchant at Elmina, and is invaluable for exactly that reason — but he was an employee of a company that armed both sides, he is explicit that his account of the war came to him at second hand *from the Report of some of the Negroes*, and his personal names for the kings (he gives the Denkyira ruler as *Bosiantey* and the Asante ruler as *Zay*) and his sequence of deaths do not reconcile with the Akan king-lists, which give Boa Amponsem dying in 1694 and Ntim Gyakari reigning from then to 1701. That discrepancy is left standing rather than harmonised. The date of the decisive battle is the weakest link on this page: 1701 is secure and universally given, but Asante tradition

and much modern writing place it in November while Bosman's letter describes the campaign as concluding early in the year and the destruction as *a few Months past*, and the two cannot both be right. His figure of above a hundred thousand killed in two battles is passed on by him as report and is treated here as a rumour of unknown magnitude, not a count; the figure will be revisited with the rest of the arithmetic.

Quotations from T. E. Bowdich are from *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee* (London, 1819), digitised text. Bowdich reached Kumasi in 1817 as the conductor of an African Company mission and recorded a great deal at first hand, including the earliest surviving outside account of Asante institutions; he was also negotiating on behalf of a power that would invade the country he was describing, he worked through interpreters whose interests were their own, and his historical chapters are what Asante officials and the Muslim scholars at the court chose to tell an Englishman. His list of twelve clans does not match the eight of the standard modern reckoning and his etymologies are unreliable; the structural point that clan membership crossed political frontiers is what is used here, and it is corroborated throughout the later literature. The whole standing difficulty of this subject should be stated plainly at the outset: the reachable written sources for this period are in the languages of merchants and soldiers from the societies that eventually conquered the one under study, while the order itself kept its records in stools, drums, oaths and recitation, and the oral traditions were collected in the twentieth century, after the conquest, by people shaped by it. Every module in this study will carry that limitation, and it will be restated where it bites.

Modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited, not quoted. The account of the seventeenth-century military transformation and of Denkyira's rise and defeat follows T. C. McCaskie's work on Denkyira in the making of Asante; the argument about land abundance, labour scarcity and the consequent centrality of property in persons, together with the 1921 census figure of 406,640 and the fifteen-to-twenty-year fallow, follows Gareth Austin's comparative study of pre-colonial and colonial Asante; the reconstruction of the Denkyira capital and its goldfields rests on the survey work of Ivor Wilks and Ray Kea. The dating of Denkyira's defeat of Adanse to about 1659 and its first appearance in European records in 1681 are McCaskie's. The Elmina note is contested and is flagged as such: Larry Yarak's examination of the Dutch records traces documented payments to Kumasi only from the 1770s and identifies the 1818 *kostbrief* as the instrument that acquired the name, so Bowdich's 1817 report of a monthly note paid to the Denkyirahene is treated here as evidence of what the Asante court said, not as proof of a transfer in 1701. Dates for the European establishments — the Portuguese arrival in 1471, Elmina built from 1482, the Dutch capture in 1637 and their

absorption of the remaining Portuguese posts by 1642 — are from the standard accounts and are not in dispute. Population and yield figures for the seventeenth century do not exist in usable form and none has been supplied here; where a figure is not given in this landscape, it is because the record does not carry one.

MODULE 1

I Joined the Campaign, But Never Heard of It

The floor of force — how a tributary town beat its own neighbours, bought powder on credit against pledged people, destroyed its overlord, and then made it a capital offence to remember any of it

The problem that had just gone wrong

Nothing about the position looked like the beginning of an empire, and the man who occupied it was not solving for one.

Some time around 1680 the chief of Kwaman, Obiri Yeboa of the Oyoko, was killed in a war with Dormaa. The tradition traces the quarrel to a dispute over who had killed an elephant, which is the sort of cause traditions do not invent and states do not advertise; and Carl Christian Reindorf, collecting Gold Coast traditions in the later nineteenth century, added a detail that will recur — that he was slain in battle, *although the Asantes pretend that he got sick in camp and died.*

His successor by the matrilineal rule was his sister's son, who was not in the country. Osei Tutu had been at the Denkyira court at Abankeseso, in the arrangement by which a tributary's heir was educated and held as a surety in the same motion, and then at Akwamu in the east, which had been the first of the inland forest Akan to convert to gunpowder warfare. He was recalled to a stool whose previous occupant had just been killed by a neighbour, in a cluster of small Oyoko towns none of which could give orders to any other, all of them paying tribute to a hegemon four days' march to the south which controlled the roads to the coast where powder was sold.

Read the position and the sequence of his decisions stops looking like statesmanship and starts looking like arithmetic. He needed an army, because his uncle's killers were unpunished and the tradition of the stool obliged him to answer it. He could not raise one by command, because the chiefs of Dwaben, Kokofu, Bekwai, Nsuta and Mampon were his kinsmen and his equals, not his subjects. He could not buy one, because the state had no revenue worth the name. What he had was three things his position handed him: a working knowledge of how the overlord's system operated, acquired inside its own capital; a military template from its most successful rival; and, if the traditions are right, a body of foreign soldiers who owed him personally.

Reindorf records that the Akwamuhene sent him home with Anum Asamoa and seven hundred armed men, and that these men did not go back — they settled in the capital and became the Adum quarter of Kumasi. The number is a tradition recorded two centuries after the event and is not corroborated by any European record I have been able to reach; it should be held loosely. What should not be held loosely is the structural fact it describes, because the same fact is recorded in the Asante state's own later architecture. The Asantehene's second-in-command of the army bore, permanently, the title *Akwamuhene* — the Akwamu chief — in every Asante state down to the present. An office named after a foreign kingdom is not a coincidence. It is a fossil of the moment a returning exile brought a borrowed military system home and never renamed it.

The instrument: wings, horns, and meal in a bag

What he brought back was an organisation. The Akwamu system divided an army into a main body, the *adonten*; a right wing, *nifa*, and a left, *benkum*; a rear guard, *kyidom*; an advance guard, *twafo*; scouts, *akwansrafo*; and the ruler's own household troops, the *gyase*. Osei Tutu imposed this on the Oyoko towns, and the decisive thing he did with it was not tactical. He assigned the commands to the chiefs.

Each *amanhene* became the commander of a wing, leading not only his own subjects but whatever other contingents were placed under his division. That single arrangement is the whole constitution of the founding, and it is worth being precise about what it bought and what it cost. It bought an army out of a set of towns that had no common sovereign, without anyone being conquered or disarmed, by giving each chief a post in a structure rather than an order to obey. It cost the centre the possibility of ever disarming them again. A grant that purchases armed service leaves the grantee holding armed men; the Asante union was assembled on exactly that clause on its first day, and whether the bill was ever presented is a question for the account of the apex, not for this one.

The rest of the instrument was fitted to the ground. There was no cavalry, because the tsetse fly kills horses in that forest, so everything was infantry. There were no fortifications; Bowdich, looking for them a century later, wrote that he *could not find that they had any idea of fortifications*, and in a country of trees and paths there was little for a fort to command. Units in close forest cannot see each other, so command ran by sound: every senior captain had a horn call of his own, phrased as a short sentence that any Asante in the street could repeat on request, and because the whole army knew every flourish, the position of each chief could be judged when he could not be seen — *whether they are advancing, falling back, or attempting to flank the*

enemy by penetrating the woods, is known, and the movements of all the others become co-operative. The King's own horns declared *I pass all Kings in the world*; another captain's said *No one dares trouble me.* Supply was solved the same way, by removing it. On active campaign the army ate nothing but a meal each man carried in a bag at his side and mixed with water in his hands, chewing kola between times, and Bowdich reports the stated reason — to prevent cooking fires betraying the position — and then adds the detail that makes him worth reading: *we tried it on our march down.* Asante scouts, he was told, had sat three and four days in high trees overlooking Cape Coast Castle on that ration and a little water before the army showed itself.

Two further features belong on the record because the framework asks for muster, pay and recruitment and this is what the record actually holds. The strength of an army was counted, and preserved, in cowries or coin held by a designated officer — a physical tally rather than a roll, which is how a state without writing keeps a number. And nobody was paid. A soldier equipped himself from the enemy: there was a distinct body of recruits attached to the army whose task was to finish the wounded with knives, and *they are all expected to return well armed from despoiling the enemy, or they are not esteemed of promise, and dismissed to some servile occupation.* An army that draws no wage has to be paid in plunder and in captives, which means the floor and the extraction are one institution rather than two, and that the institution cannot rest. That consequence will be visible in every decade of this study.

Powder on credit, and what was pledged for it

The Akwamu system was useless without muskets, and muskets came from one place.

The competition among the European companies is what made the market. Bosman, who was selling into it, described the mechanism to his correspondent without any pretence that he approved of it: *Perhaps you wonder how the Negroes come to be furnished with Fire-Arms, but you will have no Reason when you know we sell them incredible quantities, thereby obliging them with a Knife to cut our own throats. But we are forced to it; for if we would not, they might be sufficiently stored with that Commodity by the English, Danes, and Brandenburghers.* No supplier could withhold, because five others would sell. Any Akan state with gold could arm, and the constraint on arming was liquidity, not permission.

Kwaman's problem was liquidity. And here the traditions preserve a detail that is either the single sharpest fact in this module or an embellishment, and I want to mark it as unresolved on the face of the page rather than in the note. Reindorf writes that Osei Tutu *obtained a large amount of ammunition from the Danish Government on*

credit, which he secured by giving some of his people, whom he redeemed afterwards — and, in a footnote of the kind that suggests a real memory rather than a story, that a quarter of Christiansborg called *Asante-blohfin* probably took its name from those Asante sureties lodged with a local chief. Pawning — placing a person as security for a debt, redeemable on repayment, with the debtor's matrilineage answerable — was an entirely ordinary Akan credit instrument and remained one until the colonial government prohibited it in 1908, so the transaction is unremarkable in form. What makes it worth pausing on is what it says about the sequence. In a country where land was too abundant to be worth mortgaging, the only collateral a poor chief could raise at speed was people; and what he bought with them was the powder that made him rich. The founding arsenal of the Asante state was, if the tradition is accurate, financed against human beings. I have found no Danish record confirming it, and the reader should weigh it accordingly. Understanding the arithmetic is not the same as pardoning it.

What is not in doubt is that the powder was bought and that Denkyira watched it go past. Bosman, writing within months, records that the Asante king, *not being sufficiently stored with Gunpowder, he bought up great quantities on the Coast*, and that the Denkyirans, *being foolish enough to assist him themselves, suffered his Subjects to pass with it uninterrupted through their Country, notwithstanding they knew very well it was only designed for their Destruction.*

The four wars nobody counts as the founding

Before Osei Tutu fought his overlord he fought his neighbours, and this is the part of the founding that the founding story does not contain.

The Oyoko towns were newcomers in that district. Around and among them lived older communities — Tafo, Kaase, Amakom, and Guan-speaking peoples who had been there first. Reindorf preserves the moment the resentment became public, and it is a small masterpiece of documentary luck: Osafo Akotong, the king of Tafo, ordered his horn-blower to sound a phrase, and the phrase was *Osei Tutu, sɔre hɔ o twa!* — *Get away from the place, you, Osei Tutu!* The grievance, Reindorf says, was that the migrants were taking undue advantage of the land, and were eating the fish of the Nsuben, which were forbidden. So the first war of the Asante founding was a war of immigrants against the people already in the country, over land and a fishing taboo, provoked by an insult broadcast on a horn.

Four campaigns followed in sequence. Dormaa was destroyed and its refugees went west and founded Gyaman. Amakom's ruler was defeated and killed and a successor of Osei Tutu's choosing installed. Tafo was crushed and, in Reindorf's account, a district

of a hundred towns taken with it. Offinso followed. The standard modern accounts put these in the 1680s and 1690s and add Sefwi and others, and they agree on the result: the towns nearest Kwaman were absorbed into it, and Kwaman — renamed Kumasi and built up as a capital — became decisively larger than the Oyoko towns that were its formal equals.

That asymmetry is the founding, far more than any council or oath. Osei Tutu could not command Dwaben or Mampon, so he did not try; he grew until the disproportion made the question academic. It is a solution available to a specific man in a specific position with a specific instrument — a borrowed army and a neighbourhood of older, smaller, unallied communities to use it on — and it is the reason a coalition of nominal equals could be led at all when it turned south. The founding narrative that survives calls this a union of states that came together. The union was real. It was also built on top of four conquered peoples who did not come together with anybody.

Feyiase

The war with Denkyira was prepared, on the best reconstruction, across roughly a year from mid-1700, and it was won substantially before it was fought.

Denkyira's arrogance had made it universally hated — Bosman, who bought its gold, wrote that it *looked on all other Negroes with a contemptible Eye, esteeming them no more than its Slaves; which rendred it the Object of their common Hatred, each impatiently wishing its downfal* — and Osei Tutu's principal work was to convert that hatred into defection. Vassal leaders came over. Assin, annihilated by Denkyira in 1697, had a king sheltering in Kumasi, and Reindorf notes the institutional residue: because Agyeinsam of Kohyia joined the army, *the Asantes never undertake any war, unless an Asen chief be among them.* That is a rule of state derived from one man's presence on one campaign, and it is a fair specimen of how the Asante constitution was actually assembled — not designed, but accreted out of what had worked the last time.

The formal escalation, in the tradition, was conducted through a messenger whose fingers were cut off one at a time as the demands passed back and forth, until he had one finger left on each hand. Reindorf's order of battle names the commanders wing by wing — Aduenin Pim of Dwaben over the van; Mampon, Bekwai and others on the right; Tweneboa Kotia on the left; Amankwatia over the Kronti and Asafo Awere over the Akwamu contingent; the king's own captains over the bodyguard; a son of Obiri Yeboa among those over the rear — and reckons the Asante army at sixty thousand men. That figure is tradition and should be treated as an order of magnitude at best. Akwamu sent a force under a general named Gyarantwi. Denkyira brought two or

three Dutch cannon and, in Reindorf's account, a van of a thousand picked men in iron mail.

There were at least two major engagements and probably more; the fighting ran through Adunku, Abooten and Aputuogya before it reached Feyiase, and some traditions say it lasted two years. What decided it, in the account preserved on the Gold Coast, was not manoeuvre but defection in the field: Asiama Tia, fighting hard for Denkyira, was told that Ntim Gyakari had that morning beheaded his nephew and taken his wife into the harem, found the report true, and went over. Ntim Gyakari was killed where he sat — playing a board game with one of his wives, their feet shackled together in golden fetters — and the gold bracelet that turned the first sword-stroke was taken and given to Adakwa Yiadom of Dwaben. From that trophy, Reindorf says, came the Dwaben prerogative of placing a new king on the Kumasi stool, the Dwabenhene being required to touch that bracelet three times to the wrist of the new sovereign. A constitutional office, in perpetuity, out of one bracelet on one afternoon.

The plunder took fifteen days to carry off. The reported death toll — above a hundred thousand in the two battles, with thirty thousand more among the Akyem who came to Denkyira's aid — appears in Bosman as something the Negroes report, and reappears in Reindorf nearly two centuries later at the same figures, which almost certainly means Reindorf was reading Bosman rather than independently confirming him. It should be treated as a coastal rumour of unknown magnitude and not as a count. Bosman's own closing sentence needs no arithmetic at all: *Thus you see the towring Pride of Dinkira in Ashes, they being forced to fly before those, whom they not long before thought no better than their Slaves, and themselves being now sold for Slaves.*

What this floor could not do

Having built it, notice what it was not.

It was an instrument for destroying armies and it was superb at that; over the next two centuries it beat, in the field, every neighbour it faced and more than one European expedition. It was not an instrument for holding ground. There was no cavalry to patrol with, no chain of forts, no written record, no standing garrison in any conquered district, and no bureaucracy capable of reaching into a village. The economic historian Gareth Austin's judgement is the plain one: militarily strong though the kingdom was, it lacked the capacity for daily, detailed coercion at grassroots level, and that shortfall persisted right through to the colonial administration that replaced it. The forest that made the state defensible made it unpoliceable, in the same clause and for the same reason. A man with a grievance did not need to raise a rebellion. He needed a machete and a day's walk.

Two consequences follow, and between them they are the shape of the whole order.

The first is that coercion had to be episodic and spectacular rather than continuous, because a state that cannot watch everybody has to make the few occasions it does act unforgettable. The clearest evidence of that policy is in the honorifics. Bowdich records that the most famous Asante generals carried second names describing their manner of destroying prisoners — Apokoo was Abo'awassa, because he cut off their arms; Appia was Sheaboo, because he beat their heads to pieces with a stone; Amankwa was Abiniowa, because he cut off their legs. Those are not private cruelties that happened to be known. They are titles, in public use, attached to the highest officers of the state. Terror advertised is what a floor uses when it cannot afford surveillance.

The second consequence is stranger, and it is the finding of this module.

The law against remembering

Reindorf states it as a policy adopted by Osei Tutu after the four wars, which then *became the national law, strictly observed by all his successors on pain of death* — the naturalisation of the conquered provinces with all due rights as citizens. And then the clause that gives the module its edge: *Whoever dares tell his son: these people were from such and such a place, conquered and translocated to this or that town, was sure to pay for it with his life.* Nor were the conquered themselves permitted to say where they had been brought from. In exchange, and this was not nominal, *any rank or honor was conferred freely on them according to merit, but not otherwise.*

The scholarly literature on Asante knows the same rule in its proverbial form — *obi nkyerɛ obi ase*, no one discloses another's origins — and traces its institutionalisation in Asante tradition to Osei Tutu himself, in connection with the Denkyira captives and functionaries he brought into the Kumasi administration. It is normally discussed, correctly, as evidence that Asante slavery and Asante conquest were not dead ends: a man of servile or foreign origin could rise, and men of such origin did rise, and by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries office in Asante turned substantially on merit and achievement rather than birth alone.

All of that is true and none of it is the whole reading. Set the rule beside the position that produced it. Here is a state that has just conquered four peoples in its immediate neighbourhood and is about to conquer a great many more; that has no garrisons, no police, no writing, and no means of standing over a subdued district; and whose army is raised by summoning the followings of chiefs who could as easily withhold them. It cannot hold the conquered down. So it stops trying to hold them down and dissolves the category instead. It does not merely permit assimilation as a slow social drift; it enacts it, immediately, with full citizenship on one side of the clause and execution on

the other. A conquered man is a problem to be watched. A citizen who may not be told he was conquered is not.

That is not a soft alternative to force. It is force applied to memory, and the penalty is death. But it is also, on its own terms, extraordinarily effective, and its effectiveness compounds, which is the part that explains the next fifty years. Bowdich found the machinery still running in 1817 and described it in a sentence that ought to be read twice: *It is the invariable policy of Ashantee to make the contingency of the power last subdued, the revolters recently quelled, or the allies last accepted, the van of their army throughout the campaign, and very frequently there are no Ashantees but captains with the army; but it is composed entirely of tributaries and allies.* The last people beaten march in front. Odumata, he noted, subdued Banda with an army of Gyamans. And Bowdich also believed — as an outsider's estimate after five months, and it should be held as such — that by his day the unfree made up the greater proportion of the military force.

So the machine runs like this. A conquest produces captives and a defeated population. Both are absorbed, the memory of their origin is made unspeakable by law, and both are then armed and sent to the front of the next campaign, where they are also where the casualties fall. The conquest pays for itself in men. A cluster of towns thirty miles across did not become an empire by out-breeding its neighbours; it became an empire by converting each neighbour into the manpower for taking the next one, and by making it a capital offence to notice.

Miminda Kromante

The founder died the way the founder of such a state is likely to die: in the field, on a campaign against Akyem, at a river crossing, and the state could not say so.

Bowdich, in 1819, was given this: war was declared against a district between Akim and Assin; its chief, unable to face such a power, worked his small force through the forest until he reached the rear of the Asante army, where the King was following at leisure with a guard of a few hundred men, all of whom were destroyed — and *who shot the King in his hammock.* This happened near a place called Coromantee, which was razed to the ground in vengeance, and on a Saturday. And therefore, Bowdich records, *the most solemn oath of the Ashantees, is "by Saturday and Cormantee;" ("Miminda Cormantee;") and no enterprise has since been undertaken on that day of the week.*

Reindorf, in 1895, gives a different version and a different etymology. The king fell into an ambush laid at the Pra and was slain crossing the river, on a Monday. But — and Reindorf is explicit that this is contested — *this account of the king's death is refuted by the Asantes*, who say he was infirm, took the field unwillingly, and died a natural

death; whereupon Opoku Ware, telling no one, coffined the body and had it carried in the rear of the army until the campaign was won. As even the natural death of a monarch was a national calamity and a death in camp a thousand times worse, when any warrior was asked about the rumour his reply was *Mekoroe na mante* — I joined the campaign, but never heard of it. And that, in Reindorf's account, is where the oath comes from: the most binding and dreadful of Asante oaths is the sentence the army used to deny that the king was dead.

The two etymologies cannot both be right and there is no need to choose between them, because they say the same structural thing from opposite directions. This is the second time in one reign that the record shows an Asante ruler killed in the field and an official account insisting he sickened and died — Obiri Yeboa first, then his nephew. The pattern is not squeamishness. A floor of this kind rested on the personal field command of one man and on the continued attendance of chiefs who brought their own troops, and the news that the command had failed was capable of dissolving it on the spot, in the middle of enemy country, with the army strung out on a forest path. Concealment was a military necessity before it was anything else. What is remarkable is that the necessity was then made permanent: the concealment became an oath, the oath became the most binding formula in the language, and swearing it exposed the swearer to the death penalty for a false word.

Which leaves the state's deepest oath and its founding catastrophe as the same three words, and the law of the land forbidding anyone to say where the conquered came from. This module was asked to set the founding legend beside the violence it covers. In this case they are not two things laid over one another. The legend is a statute against telling, enforced by the executioner, and the violence is what it forbids you to mention.

Reading the founding against the framework

The framework holds that a conquest is made secure by two instruments working together: a floor of credible force that prices defection too high to choose, and, laid over it across generations, a belief that makes most of the governed hold the order up themselves so that the force can withdraw to the margins. Asante's founding demonstrates a third instrument, and it deserves to be named, because it is available precisely where the other two are not.

Call it **abolition of the conquered category**. A conqueror who cannot garrison — no cavalry, no forts, no writing, no daily reach into a village, and an army he must borrow back from his own peers every time he wants it — cannot price defection continuously, and has not got the generations that forming a subject population requires. What he can do is make the boundary between conqueror and conquered

legally unsayable, immediately, by statute: full citizenship, office open on merit, and the death penalty for anyone who tells a man's children where his people were brought from. This is not the slow assimilation that follows most conquests as a by-product. It is enacted, it is instantaneous, and it is capital. And the revealed-preference reading confirms what it was for: a state that had just taken four neighbouring peoples by force, and had nothing whatever with which to hold them, paid the very high price of admitting them to everything — and enforced the admission on its own citizens at the point of a sword.

Two things follow that the corpus should carry forward. The first is that this instrument compounds where garrisoning does not. A garrison is a standing cost that grows with every conquest; incorporation is a one-time cost that *converts* each conquest into the means of the next, which is why the last-subdued marched in the van and why, a century later, an English visitor could find Asante armies with no Asante in them but the captains. Where a conquest state is expanding fast and cannot pay for occupation, expect this instrument, and expect the expansion to be self-financing in manpower until something stops the expansion. The second is a caution for reading the resulting order. An order that has made the conquest unmentionable will look, to a later observer and to its own subjects, remarkably unified and remarkably free of the sullen conquered populations the framework teaches one to look for — and that appearance is not evidence of a belief that took. It is evidence of a law. The absence of a visible conquered class is a finding about the statute book before it is a finding about anyone's conviction.

Two smaller results attach. Because the army drew no wage and equipped itself from the enemy, the floor and the extraction were never separable institutions here, and neither could stand still; an order paid in plunder must keep producing plunder, which sets a direction of travel before any king chooses one. And because the founding assigned the wings of the army to the chiefs of the constituent states rather than disarming them, the arrangement that made the union possible also left every one of its members holding armed men — the classic defect of a settlement that purchases service rather than compliance, installed in the first clause, and left standing for two hundred years. Whether it was ever presented for payment is not a question about the floor, and it belongs where the arrangements inside the hierarchy are priced.

A note on sources. The exact quotations from Willem Bosman are from the 1705 English translation of the *Nauwkeurige beschryving van de Guinese Goud- Tand- en Slavekust* (Utrecht, 1704), digitised text, long *s* modernised and the wording otherwise unaltered; he was chief merchant at Elmina, wrote within months of the Denkyira war, and states plainly that his account of it came at second hand from African informants.

His employer armed both sides. Quotations from T. E. Bowdich are from *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee* (London, 1819): an eyewitness for the institutions he saw in 1817, but an agent of the African Company negotiating on behalf of a power that would invade the country he described, working through interpreters with interests of their own, and reporting Asante history as Asante officials chose to give it to an Englishman. His population estimate — 204,000 men able to bear arms, a total population reckoned at about a million in an area he put at not more than 14,000 square miles — is his own calculation after five months and is offered here as his estimate, not as a figure; modern estimates for the state's population in the 1820s run lower, around three-quarters of a million, and the range should be respected. His statement that the unfree made up the greater proportion of the military force is an outsider's impression and is flagged as such.

Carl Christian Reindorf's *History of the Gold Coast and Asante* (Basel, 1895) is used here more heavily than any European source and requires the fullest warning. Reindorf was a Ga, a Basel Mission pastor, and a Gold Coast African writing African traditions — which makes him the nearest thing available to an internal voice for a founding that no Asante wrote down. But he was writing in 1895, under British rule, after Asante's defeats of 1826 and 1874 and on the eve of its annexation; his traditions come substantially from coastal and eastern peoples whom Asante had repeatedly invaded; and he is not neutral. His chronology is unreliable — he places Osei Tutu's death about 1730, where the standard reckoning is about 1717, with Opoku Ware on the stool from 1720 — and his casualty figures for the Denkyira war reproduce Bosman's exactly, which means they are a repetition rather than a confirmation. He is used here for what he uniquely preserves and what no interest of his explains: the horn insult from Tafo, the sequence of the four wars, the mutilated messenger, the order of battle, the bracelet and the Dwaben prerogative, the naturalisation law, and the two competing accounts of the founder's death together with the Asante denial of both.

The weakest links are flagged in the body and repeated here. The seven hundred Akwamu soldiers and the Danish ammunition purchased on credit against pledged people are traditions recorded roughly two centuries after the fact, and I have found no Danish record confirming the loan; the Akwamu military influence itself is not in doubt and is attested independently by the survival of the title *Akwamuhene* as the Asante army's second command. The figure of sixty thousand for the Asante army at Feyiase is tradition. The date of the decisive battle is 1701, which is secure; whether it fell in November, as tradition and much modern writing hold, or early in the year, as Bosman's contemporary letter implies, cannot be settled here. The brass pan of gold

dust and the demand for the chiefs' favourite wives are traditions recorded in the twentieth century and are not treated as events.

Modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited, not quoted. The reconstruction of the seventeenth-century Akan military transformation and of the Denkyira war follows T. C. McCaskie; the judgement that the kingdom lacked the capacity for daily coercion at grassroots level, and the account of pawning as an ordinary and legally regulated credit instrument prohibited only in 1908, follow Gareth Austin; the sequence of Osei Tutu's early conquests and the growth of Kumasi relative to its Oyoko peers follow Ivor Wilks. The institutionalisation of *obi nkyerɛ obi ase* and its attribution in Asante tradition to Osei Tutu is drawn from the Ghanaian research literature on social mobility in pre-colonial Asante, where it is treated — rightly, and not in contradiction to the reading offered here — as the mechanism by which non-Asantes and people of servile origin became citizens and officeholders. The standing limitation of the whole study applies with particular force to this module: an order that made it a capital offence to recount where the conquered came from has left the account of its own conquests mainly in the mouths of the defeated and in the ledgers of foreign merchants.

MODULE 2

Heir to the Gold of Every Subject

The settlement — what the victors took, what the defeated were allowed to keep, and the rule that made certain no fortune outlived the man who made it

What there was to divide

Begin with the inventory, because the shape of a settlement is decided by what is actually in the room.

There was gold, in dust, weighed out on brass scales against cast weights and used as the currency of the country: the one fully portable, fully divisible, fully alienable form of wealth in the economy, and therefore the only thing a man could accumulate privately without anybody's permission. There were people — slaves bought from the northern savanna, war captives taken as state prisoners, pawns pledged against debts, wives, children, clients and followers — who in a country of abundant land and scarce labour were the substance of wealth rather than a symptom of it. There were the productive rights the forest yielded: a gold pit a man had dug, a kola tree whose surrounding bush he had cleared, a farm he had made out of standing forest. There was tribute, actual and prospective, from the states already beaten and from those about to be. There were offices. And there was land, which in the ordinary sense there was no point in dividing at all, because there was more of it than there were hands, and fallow ran fifteen to twenty years outside the immediate environs of the capital.

The last point deserves emphasis before anything else, because it removes at a stroke the instrument that most conquest settlements in this collection are built on. A conqueror who wants to bind an elite normally does it by granting land — and to grant land he must first convert it from a relation between persons into a thing that can be handed over. There was no purchase in doing that here. Land without labour was worth nothing; the scarce factors were people and the rights to the specific spots in the forest that produced something saleable. So the Asante settlement had to be made out of different materials, and it was.

The stool, which is not a chair

Everything that follows depends on one institution, and Bowdich caught its nature in a footnote he seems to have thought was a minor clarification. Explaining the phrase *to succeed to the stool*, he wrote that it *does not mean to the seat in the council, but is the*

common expression for succeeding to a property even in private life. The same stool, or seat descends through many generations.

That is the whole architecture. A stool is simultaneously an office, an ancestral seat, and an estate, and it exists at every level from the Asantehene down to an ordinary household head. Its property — its lands, its regalia, its subjects, its slaves — is attached to it and not to the person sitting on it. Bowdich states the consequence exactly where it matters, in the law of death: the fetish gold and the cloths pass to the successor to the stool, *from which the slaves and other property of the deceased are inseparable.* Inseparable. A man does not own his stool's slaves; the stool does, and he is its current occupant.

Succession to a stool ran, in Bowdich's formulation of the law as it stood, in a fixed order: *the brother, the sister's son, the son, the chief vassal or slave to the stool.* Three things are packed into that sentence. The line is matrilineal, so a man's own son ranks behind his sister's son. The son ranks at all, which is a concession to the patriline the pure clan rule would not make. And at the end of the list, ahead of nobody at all but the extinction of the stool, stands the chief slave — who can succeed. Bowdich adds that on the coast the principal slave succeeded to the exclusion of the son. In an order whose settlement is supposed to define an inside and an outside, the possibility that the last inheritor of an estate is its senior bondsman is not a footnote. It is the boundary, and we will come back to how strange a boundary it was.

Land, in this system, belonged to stools rather than to persons. What a person could own was what he had made or found on it: the farm he cleared, the kola or rubber tree he freed from bush, the shaft he sank. Ownership of the soil and ownership of what stood on it were separate questions with separate answers, and a chieftaincy customarily charged a rent — usually a third of the proceeds — to producers working its gold, kola or rubber who were not its own subjects, with some chiefs charging their own subjects too. There was no market in land itself, and the alienations that did occur in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were mostly forced sales in settlement of a debt the Asantehene had imposed on the stool by judicial fine. Note that mechanism and hold it: where land cannot be bought, it can still be taken, by fining its holder into having to part with it.

The defeated keep everything, and pay for it

Now the division proper, and the surprise is how little visible dividing there was.

The states that fought Denkyira alongside Kumasi kept their stools, their lands, their subjects and their internal government. Nobody was dispossessed. The states subsequently conquered — and over the next fifty years that came to include most of

the forest and a broad belt of savanna beyond it — very largely kept theirs as well. Bowdich, writing after a century of the system's operation, described it in a single sentence that is the best summary anyone has managed: the Asante government *conciliated those whom they subdued by continuing them in their governments, and checked them by exacting their frequent attendance at festivals, politically instituted.*

Continued in their governments. That is a recognition settlement of the purest kind — existing authorities confirmed in place rather than cleared out — and it was reached for here for the reason a conqueror always reaches for it: because clearing them out would have cost more than it was worth to a state with no capacity to administer what it took. But notice what is missing compared with every recognition settlement in the colonial cases. There was no instrument. No charter, no agreement, no schedule of estates, no clause declaring that the grantee already possessed what he was being given. The confirmation was performed by an oath and a stool, and the reason there was no document is not that Asante lacked writing — Muslim scribes were available at Kumasi and were eventually employed — but that there was nobody to show a document to.

What the confirmed rulers owed in return is the operative question, and the answer is heavy. They owed military service, and they owed it in the specific form that had built the state: the chief of a constituent Asante state commanded a wing of the army and brought his own men to it. They owed attendance — the festivals were compulsory and frequent, and requiring a subordinate ruler to present himself repeatedly at the capital is a hostage system that runs on a calendar instead of a cell. They owed tribute, and each subject state was placed, as Bowdich records, *under the immediate care of some Ashantee chief, generally resident in the capital, who seldom visited it but to receive the tribute from the native ruler, for whose conduct he was in a reasonable degree responsible.* And they surrendered two things that between them define what a subordinate ruler is: the power to make war and peace on their own account, and the power of life and death, capital punishment being reserved to the Asantehene.

Two further terms of the settlement are worth setting down because they show how finely it was engineered. A tributary's own subjects could appeal past their own ruler to Kumasi, *and claim decision by the law of Ashantee* — which converts every local dispute into a potential occasion for the centre's jurisdiction and gives the ruled a reason to prefer the empire to their own chief. And a tributary state that distinguished itself in suppressing another's revolt was rewarded with a graded legal privilege at the offender's expense: if a subject of the loyal state killed a subject of the punished one, only the price of a slave could be recovered instead of the fine attaching to the death of a freeman, with damages for other injuries reduced in proportion. That is division-and-rule

written as a schedule of blood-prices, and it means that after any rising the surviving provinces had a positive financial interest in the humiliation of the one that rose.

Kumasi's share, and what the wars actually paid

The formal equality of the states concealed a division of spoils that was anything but equal, and it widened with every campaign. As the conquests continued, the lion's share of territory and tribute accrued to the Asantehene and to the lesser Kumasi chiefs, with the provincial paramountcies given enough not to be excluded. That is the standard reconstruction and it follows from the structure: a war fought by a coalition under one commander is settled by that commander.

The most literal division of spoils in the record is also the one that shows what a settlement in this order actually consisted of. Tradition collected in the twentieth century holds that after Feyiase the body of Ntim Gyakari was divided among the victorious stools — the head to the Asantehene, and the leg-bones and vertebrae distributed to Asumegya, Mampon and Dwaben — and that those three stools were thereafter permitted to copy the dead king's regalia. Set aside the horror for a moment and read the transaction. The share allotted to a victorious chief was a piece of the enemy king's body and a licence to reproduce his ornaments. Regalia in this order were not decoration; they were the visible statement of a stool's rank, and the right to carry a particular umbrella, sword or ornament was a fact about your standing that everybody could read at a glance. To be granted the right to copy a defeated monarch's regalia was to be given a permanent, publicly legible promotion. It was, in the most exact sense available, the deed to a share.

The Dwaben share ran further. The gold bracelet on Ntim Gyakari's wrist, which turned the first sword-stroke, was taken and given to the Dwaben commander, and from that trophy — so the tradition runs — came the Dwabenhene's perpetual prerogative of placing a new king on the Kumasi stool by touching the bracelet three times to his wrist. A constitutional function of the highest order, held by one state in perpetuity, derived from an object picked up on a battlefield. This is what it looks like when institutions accrete out of incidents rather than being designed: nobody sat down to allocate the power of investiture; a man took a bracelet, and two centuries later his successors were still using it.

Two boxes and no third

Put the pieces together and the settlement resolves into exactly two containers for wealth, with nothing in between.

The first is stool property: land, subjects, slaves, regalia, offices. It is inalienable in principle, it belongs to the office and not the man, and it descends with the office through the matrilineage — or, where the Asantehene had created a new post to serve a function of central government, through a line he had chosen. Those created posts, the service stools, were deliberately made to descend from father to son rather than through the mother's line, in direct contradiction of the ordinary rule. That is not an accident of drafting. A stool that descends matrilineally belongs to a clan, and a clan is a thing older than the state which the state did not make and could not abolish; a stool that descends patrilineally has been prised out of the clan system and made to belong to the office instead. The centre, wanting servants who owed their position to it rather than to their mothers' brothers, changed the inheritance rule to get them.

The second container is self-acquired wealth, which in practice means gold dust. And the whole force of the Asante settlement is in what happened to it.

"Heir to the gold of every subject"

Bowdich states the rule flatly, as law, in 1819:

The King is heir to the gold of every subject, from the highest to the lowest; the fetish gold and the cloths are generally presented by him to the successor to the stool, from which the slaves and other property of the deceased are inseparable. The King contributes to the funeral custom to validate his claim, and usually bestows ten periguins of the dust gold on the successor, (if of a rich man,) who is in all cases liable for the debts of the deceased.

Take it apart clause by clause, because every clause is doing work.

Heir to the gold of every subject, from the highest to the lowest. The one form of wealth that a man could accumulate on his own account, carry in a pouch, and hide, does not descend to his family. It escheats to the Asantehene. Not a share of it, not a tax on it — the King is the heir. Whatever a man made in his lifetime by trade, by mining, by office or by war, the state took at his death.

The King contributes to the funeral custom to validate his claim. He pays into the funeral in order to establish the legal basis of the taking. Nothing compelled him to; he already held every instrument of force in the country and the dead man's family had no recourse whatever. That he paid anyway is the most informative fact in the passage, because a monopolist of violence who spends real resources to make a seizure lawful is telling you that some audience — here, the men of substance who would themselves die one day — needed the seizure to be lawful before they would go on accumulating under it.

Usually bestows ten periguins of the dust gold on the successor, if of a rich man. A regrant, discretionary, from the King's hand. Bowdich gives the conversions elsewhere:

a peredwan was two ounces eight ackies, which he reckoned at about ten pounds currency. So the customary return to the heir of a rich man was on the order of a hundred pounds — a real sum, and one that arrives as the King's favour rather than as the family's right.

Who is in all cases liable for the debts of the deceased. The estate's assets go to the King; the estate's liabilities stay with the heir. Stated as baldly as that, it is a confiscation with a maintenance clause attached.

And the evasion is on the record too, in the next sentence: *This law is sometimes anticipated, by a father presenting his children with large sums of gold just before his death* — with a named instance, a man called Boiteem whose son, one of the King's linguists, *discovers his wealth very deliberately.* A law that men are documented as dodging by deathbed gift is a law that bit.

The historian T. C. McCaskie has argued that these death duties were understood within Asante as part of a genuine social and cosmological compact — that wealth was held to belong ultimately to the nation, symbolised in the Golden Stool, and that its return at death was the settling of an account rather than a theft; and he traces how that understanding broke down in the nineteenth century as trade with the coast opened alternative ways of thinking about accumulation, until wealthy men began to resent the duties, many removed themselves to British territory, and those who stayed eventually rebelled. Gareth Austin has argued against the harsher reading, holding that the duties were a tax rather than a penal expropriation and that small legacies were in practice largely exempt. The disagreement is real and unresolved and should be left so. What is not in dispute is the rule's structural effect, which is the same whether it was resented or believed in: **no private fortune in Asante could compound across generations.** The stools accumulated. Persons did not.

Four beggars with an immunity

Which brings us to the sharpest single fact in this module, and it is one that a reader can check in three lines of an 1819 book.

The founding settlement did grant a hereditary privilege, and only one. Bowdich records the law twice: the direct descendants of Osei Tutu's peers and assistants — *in whom the Aristocracy originated* — were exempt from capital punishment. And in his summary of Asante law he states the same rule with the qualification that gives it away: *The direct descendants of the noble families who assisted the enterprise of Sai Tootoo, the founder of the kingdom, are not subject to capital punishment, but can only be despoiled.*

But can only be despoiled. The founders' heirs kept their necks and nothing else. And Bowdich then reports what a hundred and sixteen years of that arrangement had

produced: *There are now but four remaining, Ananqui, Assafee, (see Diary,) and two others, all beggars.*

Four men. All beggars. Holding, in 1817, the only heritable right the founding of the Asante empire conferred — a right to be robbed rather than executed. It is difficult to imagine a cleaner demonstration of what a settlement looks like when the transmission rules are set to prevent accumulation: the descendants of the men who made the state had, four generations on, exactly one asset, and it was of no value to anyone who had nothing left to lose. Ask of them the question this module exists to ask of every beneficiary in turn — if this arrangement collapsed tomorrow, would this man be better or worse off? — and the answer for the heirs of the founding aristocracy is that they would notice very little.

There is a complication in Bowdich's own text and it should be flagged rather than smoothed. Elsewhere he reports that on the accession of the reigning king, around 1799, the general assembly of the captains, *jealous of the aristocracy, and desirous of making a favourable impression on the young King, insisted that the remaining members of it, should propitiate the reign, by publicly disclaiming their exemption from capital punishment.* If the privilege was publicly renounced in 1799, its appearance in his 1817 statement of the law as still operative is a contradiction. Either the renunciation was partial or ceremonial, or the law survived the renunciation, or Bowdich has recorded two things told to him at different times by different people and has not reconciled them. That episode — a chamber of captains extracting the surrender of an aristocratic immunity at a moment of dynastic weakness — belongs to the account of how liberties are won and lost in this order, and it will be taken up there. What it establishes for the settlement is that the founding privilege was contested from below within the elite, and that it was worth so little by then that its holders could be induced to give it up for goodwill.

The boundary, and how strangely porous it was

Every settlement has an inside and an outside and a marker that separates them. In most of the cases in this collection the marker is a hard one: a bloodline, a creed, a manumission certificate, a name in a register. Asante's is the oddest in the corpus, because the state had made it a capital offence to state it.

At the bottom of the order stood the *odonko*, the outsider bought from the northern savanna, kinless by definition — without recognised ties in an Asante clan and therefore without standing in the political community. That is the outside, and it was real. But the founding law naturalised conquered populations with full citizen rights, made it death to tell a man's son where his people had been brought from,

forbade the conquered themselves to say, and opened rank *according to merit, but not otherwise*. Slaves were incorporated into the households and, through them, into the clans of their masters. A stool's chief slave stood in the line of succession to the stool. And a slave who fled into Asante from an unconnected power — Bowdich again — *is received as a free subject*, though one fleeing from an ally or tributary is restored: a rule that recruits population from beyond the system's edge while policing it inside.

So the boundary existed and was brutally consequential at the moment of enslavement, and it then dissolved, deliberately and by law, over a generation or two. The way in from below was to be bought, absorbed, and eventually forgotten. The way up, for a free commoner, was accumulation: a man who gathered enough gold and enough dependants could be recognised by the Asantehene as *obirempon*, a big man, an honour conferred through the state and marked by insignia the state controlled. That is not a career ladder in the modern sense. It is the state selling admission to the settlement, retaining the right to say who is admitted, and then taking the whole accumulated stake back at death.

Which completes the design, and it is worth stating as a single mechanism: **Asante offered almost anybody entry and almost nobody an estate.** You could rise from captivity to office. You could not leave your children a fortune.

Reading the settlement against the framework

The framework holds that a settlement's characteristic technology is the conversion of relations into things — office into estate, clan right into parcel, collective patrimony into share — because wealth that is a relation between persons cannot be granted, and a conqueror who wants to bind an elite must first make the wealth grantable. Asante ran that machinery backwards, and the inversion is this module's contribution.

Here the one thing in the economy that was already fully a *thing* — gold dust, portable, divisible, anonymous, the only wealth a man could hold entirely on his own account — was the thing the settlement attacked. It was made non-heritable and escheated to the apex at every death, from the highest to the lowest. Meanwhile land, offices, subjects and slaves were locked into stools, where they were inseparable from a position and could not be sold. The settlement's technology was not commodification but **de-commodification**: the deliberate prevention of transferable, accumulable private wealth. And once stated that way the two moves are recognisably the same problem approached from opposite ends. A conqueror who needs to *bind* an elite he has just met converts relations into things so that he has something to grant. A conqueror whose elite are his own kinsmen and battlefield peers, and who fears not their disloyalty but their independence, converts things into relations he controls, so

that there is nothing for them to hold that does not run through him. **Which direction a settlement runs the conversion tells you which problem the apex actually had.** Where the danger is an elite that will not obey, expect grants. Where the danger is an elite that could stop needing you, expect escheat.

Two things attach to that, and they compound with what the founding already established.

The first concerns the settlement's fiction. The card names three — declaring occupied land vacant, declaring a grantee already in possession, declaring a collective holding partible — and observes that which one a conqueror reaches for tells you what he wanted. Asante reached for none of them, and the reason is instructive: **the fictions exist to satisfy an audience with recourse, and where there is no such audience there is no fiction.** A conqueror answerable to a metropole that believes in law must convert a seizure into an ordinary lawful transaction, and the elaboration of the instrument is the measure of the constraint he is under. Asante answered to nobody. Toward the conquered, therefore, it produced no instrument at all, and its apex could state the basis of his title to a foreign envoy in one unlaundered sentence: *if I fight a king, and kill him when he is insolent, then certainly I must have his gold, and his slaves, and the people are mine too.* But this does not mean the order was fiction-free, and the correction matters. It ran its fiction toward the audience that did have recourse — its own armed constituent chiefs, who could withhold their contingents — and that fiction was ritual rather than legal: an oath, a stool, and a story of states that had come together freely, with four conquered neighbours quietly inside the arrangement and unmentionable by law. So the finding to carry forward is not that non-European conquests dispense with fictions. It is that **the fiction is always aimed where the recourse is, and its medium follows the audience**: paper for a metropole that reads, oath and regalia for peers who fight, and nothing at all for people who can do neither.

The second is the consideration, and it is the same defect this order installed on its first day. What the settlement purchased from the constituent chiefs was armed service — each *amanhene* commanding a wing, bringing his own men, keeping his own stool, his own subjects and his own capacity to fight. A grant that buys service leaves a rival holding a retinue; a grant that buys compliance leaves a dependant holding a title. Asante bought service, every time, for two hundred years, and never once disarmed a grantee. The centre's answer to the resulting exposure was not to take the retinues away — it could not — but to make sure that nobody underneath it accumulated anything transferable that a retinue could be paid with. Death duties and armed provincial chiefs are not two separate facts about this order. They are one arrangement: **an apex that cannot disarm its elite will instead attack its liquidity.** Whether that answer held is

not a question about who got what. It is a question about what happened inside the hierarchy, and it is where the sharpest attention in this study is owed.

A note on sources. The load-bearing quotations are from T. E. Bowdich, *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee* (London, 1819), digitised text: the footnote defining a stool as an estate; the order of succession; the law that the King is heir to the gold of every subject, with the King's contribution to the funeral to validate the claim, the customary ten peredwans to the successor, the heir's liability for debts, and the named instance of evasion by deathbed gift; the description of subdued rulers continued in their governments and checked by compulsory festival attendance; the placing of each subject state under a Kumasi chief responsible for its ruler's conduct; the tributary subject's right of appeal to the law of Ashantee; the reduced blood-prices rewarding a tributary that suppresses another's revolt; the runaway-slave rule; the collectors' commission of two peredwans in ten; the gold weights (a peredwan given as two ounces eight ackies, about ten pounds currency); and the exemption of the founders' descendants from capital punishment, *but can only be despoiled*, with four holders remaining, all beggars. Bowdich is an eyewitness for what he saw in 1817 and a reporter of what Asante officials chose to tell him about everything earlier. He was an agent of the African Company negotiating on behalf of a power that would invade the country; he worked through interpreters; and his statements of Asante law are an outsider's summary of an unwritten system, not a code. The contradiction between his report that the aristocratic immunity was publicly disclaimed around 1799 and his statement that four men still held it in 1817 is left standing on the page rather than resolved, because I cannot resolve it.

The single clause of Asantehene Osei Bonsu's own speech is from Joseph Dupuis, *Journal of a Residence in Ashantee* (London, 1824), digitised text, taken from a longer exchange whose principal subject is the slave trade and which belongs elsewhere in this study. Dupuis carries the same warning as Bowdich and more sharply: he was British consul at Kumasi, negotiating a treaty his own superiors at Cape Coast then repudiated, and he had a case to make in print. The words are given as he recorded them and not as a transcript.

Modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited. The distinction between ownership of the soil and ownership of what stands on it, the customary one-third rent charged to non-subjects working gold, kola or rubber, the absence of a real market in land, the alienations arising from fines imposed by the Asantehene, the land-abundance and labour-scarcity that make people rather than acres the object of a settlement, and the argument that death duties were a tax rather than a penal expropriation, are Gareth Austin's. The reading of accumulation and death duties

within an Asante social and cosmological compact, and the account of that compact's nineteenth-century breakdown among wealthy men, is T. C. McCaskie's; his reading and Austin's disagree and both are given. The concentration of conquered territory and tribute in the hands of the Asantehene and the Kumasi chiefs, the Asantehene's reservation of capital punishment, and the creation of service stools inherited patrilineally in contradiction of the ordinary matrilineal rule follow Ivor Wilks, whose characterisation of the resulting administration as bureaucratic is contested by Kwame Arhin, Larry Yarak and McCaskie in favour of patrimonialism; that dispute is noted and not adjudicated here. The definition of the *odonko* as kinless and therefore without standing in the political community follows Meyer Fortes as discussed in the Asante slavery literature.

The weakest evidence is flagged where it appears. The division of Ntim Gyakari's body among the victorious stools and the consequent right of three of them to copy his regalia is a tradition reported in R. S. Rattray's ethnographic work of the 1920s and reached here at second hand; the Dwaben bracelet and the investiture prerogative derived from it come from Reindorf's collected traditions of 1895. Both are given as traditions about the division of spoils rather than as verified events, and both are recorded long after the fact by men working within or under the order's successors. The standing limitation of this study bears on this module with particular force: a settlement whose instruments were an oath, a stool and a piece of regalia leaves no charter to read, and everything above is reconstructed either from the testimony of foreign visitors or from traditions collected after the conquest by people the conquest had shaped.

MODULE 3

Constructed and Carved

The robe — the object that turned a war coalition into a nation, dated against the acts it covers; the second robe the Asantehene wore on his own body; and the treasure he was forbidden to look at

The problem a story had to solve

By about 1701 a man in Kumasi held something no Akan had held before: the largest army in the forest, made out of contingents belonging to chiefs who were his kinsmen and his formal equals, none of whom he could command by right. He had grown Kumasi by conquering four smaller neighbours until the disproportion was decisive, and he had led the coalition that destroyed the region's hegemon and taken its treasure, its craftsmen and its people. What he did not have was any account of why the arrangement should continue now that the war it was made for had been won.

That is the exact problem a robe exists to solve, and it is worth being precise about which audience posed it. It was not the Asante commoner, who had never had a say and had nothing to withhold. It was not the conquered — Denkyira had been broken, its survivors sold or absorbed, and nobody needed their opinion. It was the chiefs of Dwaben, Mampon, Bekwai, Kokofu, Nsuta, Kumawu and Asumegya, each of whom still commanded his own men, still sat on his own stool, and could at any moment decide that the alliance had served its purpose. The Asantehene's difficulty was that any story making Kumasi rightful would be, transparently, a story about Kumasi — and men who have just fought a war against being subordinate to a neighbouring town do not accept subordination to a different neighbouring town because somebody has invented a reason.

The solution was to relocate the object of allegiance out of Kumasi altogether, into a thing.

What lay underneath: the cosmology the state did not invent

The state built nothing from scratch, and the framework's reason for expecting that is the right one: legitimacy is borrowed from a currency the audience already honours, never minted new. What Asante borrowed was an Akan religious world older than any of its states.

At the top stood Nyame, the supreme god, creator, sky, remote — worshipped in no temple, served by no priesthood, addressed through intermediaries. Beneath him the *abosom*, the lesser gods, described as his children: located in rivers, rocks, lakes and pots, each with a shrine and a custodian, each approached for specific things — a cure, a child, the detection of a witch, the truth of a disputed matter. Below and beside them the *asuman*, made objects with power in them. And running through everything, the ancestors.

The ancestors are the part that matters here, because the state's whole architecture is built on them rather than on the gods. An Akan person was composed: blood, *mogya*, from the mother, fixing his clan; spirit, *sunsum*, from the father, fixing his personality; and *kra*, a soul from Nyame. Death did not remove a person from the community. It moved him to the ancestors, who remained interested, obliged and dangerous, and who were reached through the stool he had sat on. A chief's stool was blackened at his death and kept in a stool-house, and at the *adae* — the ritual days that scored the year in cycles of forty-two — the reigning occupant fed them, poured drink and blood on them, and spoke to them on the community's behalf.

So the chief's authority did not come from the living at all. It came through him from the dead, and his qualification was that he sat where they had sat. This is worth holding clearly, because it explains why the political vocabulary of this order is a vocabulary of furniture. To succeed to the stool is to succeed; to be removed from office is to be destooled. Every household head had one. The state simply needed one that outranked all of them and belonged to nobody.

The gods that could be sacked

Before coming to that object, one feature of this religious world deserves separate notice, because it bears directly on whether the doctrine was tested or revealed, and the answer is unusually clear.

The *abosom* were judged by results. A deity that produced was honoured; a deity that repeatedly failed was abandoned, its shrine left empty, its priest without clients. The philosopher J. B. Danquah put it as an Akan commonplace that the gods are respected when they deliver and treated with contempt when they do not, and Rattray, going round Asante in the 1920s, found a great many disused shrines. New gods arrived constantly, carried in by traders and by possessed novices, and were tried; the ones that worked stayed. Nyame, at the top, was insulated from this entirely — precisely because nothing specific was ever asked of him, and a god of whom nothing is asked can never be caught failing.

That is a remarkably durable architecture, and it is more sophisticated than the tested/revealed distinction usually allows for. The whole testable layer is disposable, which keeps the system honest and responsive and gives every disappointed believer somewhere to go that is not out; the untestable layer at the top is unfalsifiable, which keeps the frame intact no matter how many shrines empty. Failure never propagates upward, because the thing that failed was only ever a messenger.

Now ask where the state chose to put its own object. Not among the *abosom*, where it could have been discarded for underperformance. The Golden Stool was placed with the ancestors and the nation, in the register that is not evaluated — and that placement is the single most consequential decision in the design.

The object, and what it claimed

The Golden Stool — *Sika Dwa Kofi*, the golden stool born on a Friday — is the most concentrated robe object in this collection. As it is now understood, and as it has been understood for at least a century, it contains the *sunsum* of the Asante nation, the spirit of the whole people including the dead and the unborn; the nation's welfare is bound to its safety; it is not sat upon; it does not touch the ground; and it is not the king's property. The Asantehene is enstooled *beside* it, lowered and raised over it without contact. He is its custodian, and it outranks him.

Read that as a political instrument and every clause does work.

It relocates the object of allegiance out of Kumasi. A chief of Dwaben swearing to the Golden Stool is not swearing to the town that beat his enemies; he is swearing to the nation, which happens to keep its soul in Kumasi's care. That is exactly the difficulty of 1701 solved — Osei Tutu could not command his equals, so he arranged for something above all of them to be commanded by nobody.

It converts an agreement into an entity. A coalition can be dissolved by the parties that made it. A people whose spirit is lodged in an object cannot be dissolved at all without destroying the object, and no chief could propose secession without proposing something closer to suicide than to policy.

It sanctifies the founding force. The four wars against Dormaa, Amakom, Tafo and Offinso, and the destruction of Denkyira, produced a unit; the stool presents that unit as an ensouled natural thing with a spirit of its own rather than as the residue of five campaigns. Set beside the law making it a capital offence to tell a man where his people had been conquered from, the two instruments are one operation from two directions: the law removes the memory of how the parts were assembled, and the stool supplies a reason why the whole was always one thing.

And it ranks persons without ranking towns. The king is the servant of the object; the chiefs are sworn to it; and no one is asked to concede that anybody else's ancestors were better.

We also have, from before the British ever fought Asante, a hard measurement of how much political weight the object carried. Bowdich, setting down what he had been told in 1817 about the deposition of Asantehene Osei Kwame around 1799, notes that it *was protracted from his having it in his possession at Dwabin.* A king whom the chief captains and the queen mother had agreed to remove could not be removed promptly, because he was holding the stool. That is not reverence reported by a devotee. It is a procedural obstacle recorded by a foreign visitor with no interest in the matter, and it tells you the object was load-bearing in the plainest possible way.

Dating the object against the act

Here the Venice method has to be run, and it produces a result that has to be stated carefully, because the temptation to over-read it is strong and the evidence will not bear the weight the temptation wants.

Set out what is in the record and when.

1817–19. Bowdich, an eyewitness resident five months in Kumasi, sees and describes a royal stool *entirely cased in gold*, carried under its own umbrella in procession. He records that at the great *adae* the King goes to the fetish house opposite the palace, offers sheep, and that *the blood of this sacrifice is poured on the gold stool, to which extraordinary virtues are ascribed, being considered the palladium of the kingdom.* He gives its political effect in the deposition of 1799. He does not mention a priest named Anokye. He does not mention a descent from the sky. He describes the founding of the kingdom, at length, as an emigration in which Osei Tutu *founded Coomassie, and was presented with the stool, or made King, from his superior qualifications* — an election, on merit, encouraged by omens.

1820–24. Dupuis, British consul at Kumasi, an Arabist with unusual access, describes the throne, the royal death stool *clotted with the gore* of sacrifice, and records the Asantehene saying of executed captives that he *washed my stool in their blood for the fetische.* No Anokye. No sky.

1895. Carl Christian Reindorf, a Gold Coast African writing Akan traditions, gives the first surviving account of the object's origin — and it is an account of manufacture. Describing Akan kingship generally, he writes that the royal stool is, by order of the king who established the dynasty, *constructed and carved, generally out of "osesew" or any other hard wood*, that it is *generally worshipped as a kind of national fetish*, that it is annually painted with the blood of victims, and that *the subjects are taught to fear it.* Of

Asante specifically: *The stool of Asante was made by Okomfo Anokye, who told them that the stool was possessed with the spirit of an albino* — and that consequently no white man or albino was ever sacrificed to it.

1923. Rattray, publishing the ethnography that has shaped every account since, gives the narrative now universally told: Anokye assembling the chiefs, the sky darkening, the stool descending out of the air onto Osei Tutu's knees, made by no human hand, containing the *sunsum* of the nation.

Read as a sequence that is a clean layering: the object is attested from 1817, the claim that a named man *made* it from 1895, and the descent from heaven from the 1920s. And the temptation is to conclude that the miracle grew late — that a wooden stool overlaid with gold, commissioned by a king and authorised by his priest with a story about an albino's spirit, acquired its heavenly origin only after the kingdom had been beaten and needed one.

That conclusion is not available on this evidence, and it is important to say why rather than to imply it and move on. Bowdich and Dupuis were foreigners in a hostile capital for a few months, working through interpreters with agendas of their own, and the *Sika Dwa* was deliberately withheld from view — rarely displayed, protected by secrecy, and not the sort of thing a court explains to an English agent. Their silence is not evidence. Reindorf was a Basel Mission pastor with an explicit interest in presenting Akan religion as superstition introduced by a charlatan, and he says so on the page, calling Anokye a Guan from Awukugua through whom *superstition and fetishism was introduced into the Tshi tribe*; his account of manufacture is exactly what a Christian minister collecting traditions would be most disposed to hear and to write down. And Rattray, whatever else he was, spent years with Asante informants with access no earlier outsider had.

So the honest finding is narrower and, I think, more useful. **What can be established is that the object was politically load-bearing within a century of the founding — we have a deposition it delayed — and that the earliest surviving account of its origin, written by an African from African tradition, is an account of a thing commissioned, carved and given a story to carry.** Whether that account displaced an older miracle or preceded a newer one cannot be settled from what survives, and anyone who tells you otherwise is reading silence.

And it does not matter for the mechanism, which is the discipline this study is obliged to hold. A conqueror never mints legitimacy; he borrows a currency his audience already honours. Every Akan household already had a stool that was an ancestral seat and a locus of the spirit; every chief already had one blackened and fed. What Anokye produced — whether by carving or by conjuring — was not a new

currency but a new denomination in an existing one, of a kind every man present already knew how to value. That is precisely why it took, and it is the difference between this and the forged authorities in this collection that nobody ever knelt to. A throne a conqueror builds out of nothing is a throne nobody kneels to. A throne built out of the exact material every kneeling man already used at home is another matter entirely.

And a built thing that became real is not a lie. Reindorf's own sentence — the subjects *are taught to fear it* — names the formation mechanism from a hostile witness, and the teaching worked, across generations, until the belief was as much a fact about Asante as the forest was. That the origin was arranged does not make the conviction a performance. It makes it a thing that was built and then became real, which is more durable than any deception, and which is why in 1900 a people whose army had already been destroyed twice went to war over an object rather than surrender it.

The second robe, worn on the same body

The framework expects an apex facing more than one audience to run more than one robe, each in the currency that audience honours, and generally expects the audiences not to compare notes. Asante ran two, and the audiences sat in the same courtyard.

Asante's northern trade — kola out, slaves, cloth, leather and livestock in — ran to a Muslim world: Gonja, Dagomba, the Hausa cities, and beyond them the Sudanic states. Muslims lived at Kumasi in numbers. Dupuis, entering the capital in 1820, passed the quarters of the Moslems and found *about three hundred people of that faith (including slaves)* seated round their Bashaw, with no drums and no armed avenue, in a *dignity and decorum of the soberest cast.* They were a recognised corporation with a recognised head, present in the royal reception, and their scribes served the court.

And the Asantehene wore their religion on his person. Bowdich, describing the King and his great men at the yam custom, records *saphies* — written Qur'anic charms — cased in gold and silver among the ornaments, three of them on a red silk cord over one chief's shoulder, and notes elsewhere that the tributary king of Dagomba's reputation for making saphies was an asset in his relationship with Kumasi. When Osei Bonsu argued the case for the slave trade to Dupuis in 1820, he reached for the same currency: *Is not your law an old law, the same as the Crammo law? Do you not both serve the same God, only you have different fashions and customs? Crammos are strong people in fetische, and they say the law is good, because the great God made the book.*

Two robes, then, worn simultaneously and visibly by the same man in the same city: the ancestral stool toward Asante and its chiefs, and Islamic protective writing toward

the northern trade and the northern powers. The framework's usual explanation for how such a pairing survives — that the audiences never hear each other's version — does not apply here, because they were in the same durbar. So the case supplies a refinement. **Two robes can be worn in one room without collision when they answer different questions.** The stool answered who may rightfully rule Asante; the saphie answered whether a man will survive a battle and whether the northern merchants will trust him. A protective amulet makes no claim about sovereignty and therefore cannot contradict a claim about sovereignty. Robes collide only when both purport to name the rightful ruler, and Asante was careful never to let the second one do that.

And note where the robe stopped. The conquered provinces of the north were never asked to believe in the Golden Stool. They were required to send tribute, to receive a Kumasi chief responsible for their conduct, and — as Bowdich records of subdued rulers generally — to present themselves frequently at the festivals in the capital. Attendance at Odwira by a tributary ruler was not formation; it was homage, performed and observed. Belief was cultivated at the core and not demanded at the periphery, which is exactly what a thick centre and a thin edge look like from the inside.

The treasure he was not allowed to look at

Which leaves the hardest question the module has to attempt: whether the men at the top believed any of it. Sincerity at an apex is permanently unrecoverable and the only instrument available is the deviation test, held as probability and never as verdict — does the apex break toward personal advantage, or does it pay a real, avoidable cost for something it values above both doctrine and self?

Asante offers an unusually clean instance, and it comes from Bowdich, in a passage about property rather than religion, which is what makes it good evidence.

We have established that the Asantehene was heir to the gold of every subject in the country, from the highest to the lowest. He was also, by every account, chronically in need of revenue, running a state whose taxable base was thin and whose army had to be paid in plunder. And in the middle of his capital, at the royal mausoleum at Bantama, lay the accumulated gold buried with the royal dead. Bowdich states the rule: that gold *is sacred; and cannot be used, but to redeem the capital from the hands of an enemy, or in extreme national distress; and even then, the King must avoid the sight of it, if he would avoid the fatal vengeance of the fetish or deity.*

Consider the position. A man who by law inherits every private fortune in his kingdom is barred from touching the largest single hoard in it, which sits a short walk from his palace, guarded by nothing but a prohibition he himself would have to

enforce; and in the extremity where he is permitted to spend it, he is required not to look at it. There is no external power compelling this. No metropole is watching; no rival faith is competing; no assembly could impeach him for it. He forgoes it anyway.

Force never pays for what it does not need. An apex that already holds uncontested violence and still declines revenue it could simply take has told you something the surviving statements of his court could not: that this belief was not a convenience laid on for other people. Whether Osei Bonsu privately believed a deity would strike him is unknowable and beside the point. What the ledger shows is that the constraint operated on the man at the top, at real cost, in the one currency he was always short of.

Reading the robe against the framework

The framework holds that a robe is never minted, only borrowed from a currency the relevant audience already honours; that an apex facing several audiences will run several robes; and that the trusted-information leg is acquired by forging a new authority, redirecting an existing one, or inheriting a vacancy. Asante confirms the first and complicates the third, and this module's contribution lies in the complication.

The Golden Stool looks, at first sight, like the corpus's purest instance of a **forgery** — a sacred object manufactured at a known moment by a named man for a stated political purpose, which is precisely the expensive and risky option the framework warns tends to be caught. It was not caught. It became, and remains, the most successful robe object in this collection. The reason is that the category is too coarse, and the case forces a distinction inside it. **A forgery in an existing currency is not a forgery in the sense that matters.** Anokye did not manufacture a new kind of sacred authority and ask people to start honouring it; he manufactured a new instance of the most familiar sacred object in Akan life, in the one form every man in the room already kept in his own house and already fed with drink at the *adae*. The cues that vigilance reads were not counterfeited — they were genuine, because the thing really was a stool, really did hold a spirit in exactly the way stools were known to, and really was fed with blood on the ordinary calendar. What was novel was only its rank.

Set that beside the conquest orders in this collection that tried to build an authority out of nothing and had to police the result forever, and the operative variable becomes visible. It is not forged-versus-inherited. It is **whether the new object is denominated in a currency already in circulation**. Where it is, the forgery is indistinguishable from the genuine article to the audience that matters, because for that audience there is nothing to distinguish; where it is not, no amount of ceremony will make it spend. That is the rule this case adds, and it explains a puzzle the corpus has carried: why some manufactured legitimacies take root within a generation while others never earn a knee.

Three smaller results attach, and they compound with what the founding and the settlement already established.

The first concerns placement. This religious world ran a genuinely tested layer — gods evaluated on delivery, discarded when they failed, shrines left empty — under a supreme god insulated from testing because nothing specific was ever asked of him. The state, having a free choice of registers, put its object in the untestable one: not among the deities who could be sacked for underperformance, but with the ancestors and the nation. That is a design decision and it should be read as one. **Where an order's own religion contains both a tested and an untestable register, watch which one the state's central object is filed under; it will be the untestable one, and the filing is the tell.**

The second concerns the audience. This robe was cut for the constituent chiefs — the men with retinues who could withhold them — and it was cut for them because they were the only audience with recourse. The Asante commoner got it too, through the calendar, and believed it deeply; the conquered northern provinces were never offered it and were required only to attend and to pay. The settlement had already shown the same pattern, running its fiction toward the armed peers and none at all toward people who could do nothing. So the finding sharpens: in this order, **the whole apparatus of persuasion points at whoever could still have said no**, and everyone else is handled by the calendar or the tribute schedule.

The third is the corrective the framework insists on and this case makes easy to forget. Every element above can be given a function, and the functions are real. None of that makes the belief a trick or the believers dupes. The object was fed at the *adae* by kings who forwent treasure rather than offend it, sworn to by chiefs whose descendants still swear to it, and defended in 1900 by a people with nothing military left to defend it with. A robe with a datable origin and an identifiable political purpose is not thereby a fraud; it is a thing that was built and then became real. The building is the finding. The reality is the reason the building mattered.

A note on sources. The exact quotations are from four public-domain works. T. E. Bowdich, *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee* (London, 1819): the royal stool cased in gold in procession; the sacrifice at the great adae and the blood poured on the gold stool, called the palladium of the kingdom; the protraction of Osei Kwame's deposition by his possession of it at Dwaben; the founding of Kumasi and Osei Tutu being presented with the stool from his superior qualifications; the saphies worn cased in gold and silver; the Dagomba king's reputation for making them; and the sacred gold at Bantama that may be spent only to ransom the capital or in extreme national distress, and even then unseen. Joseph Dupuis, *Journal of a Residence in Ashantee*

(London, 1824): the Muslim quarter and its Bashaw with about three hundred people of that faith including slaves; the royal death stool clotted with gore; the Asantehene washing his stool in the blood of executed captives; and his appeal to the Crammo law. Carl Christian Reindorf, *History of the Gold Coast and Asante* (Basel, 1895): the royal stool constructed and carved out of hard wood by order of the founding king, worshipped as a national fetish, annually painted with the blood of victims, the subjects taught to fear it; the stool of Asante made by Okomfo Anokye and said to hold the spirit of an albino; and Anokye's Guan origin at Awukugua.

Every one of these witnesses is compromised in a way the reader must weigh. Bowdich was an agent of a company negotiating for a power that would later invade, resident five months, working through interpreters. Dupuis was British consul at Kumasi, negotiating a treaty his own superiors repudiated, and had a case to argue in print. Reindorf was a Basel Mission pastor writing under British rule on the eve of Asante's annexation, drawing on traditions from peoples Asante had repeatedly invaded, and his stated view that Anokye introduced superstition and fetishism into the Akan is his own hostile framing and is presented as such. R. S. Rattray's *Ashanti* (1923), the source of the sky-descent narrative in the form now universally told, is described but not quoted; Rattray was the colonial government's anthropologist, working after the conquest, with access no earlier outsider had and a position no earlier outsider had either.

The dating exercise in this module rests on an argument from silence and is flagged as such on the page rather than only here. Bowdich and Dupuis do not mention Okomfo Anokye or a stool descended from the sky; that is a fact about their texts and not evidence about Asante belief in 1820, because the *Sika Dwa* was deliberately guarded and neither man had the access such a disclosure would require. The sequence of the record is set out and the conclusion the sequence invites is explicitly declined. What is asserted is only what the documents support: that the object was politically decisive by 1799, and that the earliest surviving account of its origin describes manufacture.

Modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited. The account of Akan cosmology — Nyame and the *abosom*, the composition of the person from *mogya*, *sunsum* and *kra*, the blackened stools and the *adae* cycle of forty-two days — follows the standard ethnographic and reference literature deriving from Rattray and his successors. The observation that lesser deities are judged on performance and abandoned when they fail is J. B. Danquah's, paraphrased, and Rattray's finding of numerous disused shrines is reported at second hand from the literature on Akan religion. Ivor Wilks's work on the Golden Stool and on the 1826 campaign, and the dispute over whether the stool was

carried to Katamanso and briefly lost, are noted for the account of the order's ending rather than used here. The study's standing limitation applies with unusual force to this module: an order whose central sacred object was withheld from view by design has left the reconstruction of its meaning to men who were not permitted to see it, and to traditions written down after the order that guarded it had been destroyed.

MODULE 4

There Is a Gloomy Silence

Formation — the calendar that scored the year, the archive that was performed instead of read, and what a state installs in a child when there is nothing to write on

There is no unformed person

Formation is not schooling and it is not indoctrination in the usual sense of an argument pressed on someone capable of refusing it. It is the installation, in a person too young to have any defence, of the whole framework through which he will afterwards judge everything: who his natural superiors are, which sources are worth believing, what counts as an honourable life, what is beyond argument altogether. The governing fact is that nobody escapes it. There is no unformed person; to be unformed would be to be feral. Every child is formed by whoever is doing the work in the place where he happens to be born, and the only question a study of an order can ask is who was doing it and what they installed.

Asante presents the sharpest test of this that the collection has met, because the state had nothing to write on. Every formation system examined here so far has run partly on text — a catechism, a curriculum, a liturgy printed and distributed, a register of names. Asante ran on drums, horns, festivals, oaths, stools, proverbs and the recitation of genealogy by trained men who had memorised it. The question the case is here to answer is whether that makes the formation weaker, stronger, or merely different. The answer, on the evidence, is that it makes it **less contestable and more fragile** — and that those two properties are the same property seen from opposite sides.

The first thing installed, and the thing it made unbearable

Before the state reaches a child, the clan has. An Akan child was born into his mother's *abusua* and took his standing, his inheritance, his obligations and his right to be buried from it. He was named on the eighth day, at the *outdooring*, and took a day-name from the day of his birth; before that ceremony he was not yet fully a person, and an infant who died sooner was not mourned as one. From the outdooring forward his life was structured by a lineage: the mother's brother rather than the father as the source of authority and inheritance, the ancestors of that lineage as the invisible constituency whose good opinion mattered, the blackened stool in the family stool-house as the place they were addressed.

This is the first and deepest lever, and it is the coalitional one. What the Akan system installs before a child can weigh anything is that a person without a lineage is not poor or unlucky but *nothing*: no claim on land, no one to answer for his debts, no one to avenge him, no one to bury him, no ancestors to become. The technical term for the enslaved outsider, the *odonko*, is defined by exactly this — kinless, and therefore without standing in the political community at all. In such a world expulsion is not a hardship, it is annihilation, and the fear of it is doing more work than any doctrine ever needs to do.

And here the state's founding legislation becomes visible as something more than an administrative device. The law naturalising conquered populations with full citizen rights, and making it a capital offence to tell a man's children where his people had been brought from, did not merely dissolve a category the state could not police. It **made the state the supplier of the one thing nobody in that society could live without.** A captive absorbed into an Asante household entered a clan through it; his descendants were Asante; and the law that forbade anyone to say otherwise was, from the inside, the guarantee that the belonging was real. Whatever else it was, it was an offer nobody could refuse, made in the only currency that mattered, by the only institution that could issue it.

The calendar

Over the clan the state laid a calendar, and the calendar is the state's principal formative instrument in every case in this collection, because it is the thing that reaches every person at fixed intervals without anyone having to be persuaded of anything.

The Akan year ran not in months but in a cycle of forty-two days, the *adaduanan*, repeated nine times. Within each cycle fell two *adae* — the great one always on a Sunday, the lesser always on a Wednesday. Bowdich, working it out for himself in 1817, reckoned six weeks between each great *adae* and six between each little one, so that in practice the observance fell roughly every three weeks. At each *adae* the chief entered the stool-house, fed the blackened stools of his predecessors with drink and blood, and spoke to the ancestors on the community's behalf. The same rite was performed at every level from the Asantehene down to a village head, on the same day, all over the country.

Consider what that does without anyone intending it as propaganda. Every twenty-one days, in every settlement in Asante, the entire population is reminded simultaneously that authority runs through the dead, that the dead are reached through stools, and that the man who reaches them is the one on the stool. The

message needs no argument because it is never stated as a proposition. It is simply the shape the year has.

Bowdich also records how the day opened in the capital, and the detail is worth having exactly: the great drum at the palace gate, *adorned with skulls and thigh bones*, was struck hard at sunset the evening before as a signal; the whole establishment of the palace shouted; *and their shout is echoed by the people throughout the town.* A drum speaks, a palace answers, a town answers the palace. Music and firing through the night. Nobody in Kumasi could be asleep, unaware, or uninvolved.

The Odwira, and an archive made of bone

Once a year the whole apparatus concentrated into a single event, and Bowdich was present for it in September 1817 — which makes the Asante national festival one of the very few in this collection described from the inside of the crowd by someone who was writing everything down.

The yam was planted in December and **not eaten until the custom concluded** in early September. That is the first fact and it is the most powerful, because it is not symbolic. The state's ritual calendar controlled when the population was permitted to eat a staple crop, and it did so for nine months of every year. There is no more complete way of installing a calendar in a body.

Attendance was compulsory. All the caboceers and captains, and the majority of tributaries, were *enjoined to attend, none being excused* except the distant northern kings of Gonja and Dagomba, who sent deputations, and men absent on public business. And attendance was dangerous, in a way Bowdich states with unusual precision: *If a chief or caboceer has offended, or if his fidelity be suspected, he is seldom accused or punished until the Yam Custom, which they attend frequently unconscious, and always uncertain of what may be laid to their charge.* The great festival of national unity was also the annual assize at which the disloyal were tried. Every chief in the empire came to the capital once a year not knowing whether he was coming to a celebration or to his own trial.

Alongside that ran a licensed inversion of the ordinary rules — *The Yam Custom is like the Saturnalia; neither theft, intrigue, or assault are punishable during the continuance, but the grossest liberty prevails* — which is the mechanism a great many orders discovered independently, because a rule that is suspended once a year on the state's authority is a rule everybody has been reminded belongs to the state.

Then the central spectacle, and this is the part that answers the question about a state with nothing to write on.

On the Saturday afternoon the King received the chiefs in the great square where the captured Denkyira cannon stood. And into that square came the executioners: *All the heads of the kings and caboceers whose kingdoms had been conquered, from Sai Tootoo to the present reign, with those of the chiefs who had been executed for subsequent revolts, were displayed by two parties of executioners, each upwards of a hundred, who passed in an impassioned dance, some with the most irresistible grimace, some with the most frightful gesture: they clashed their knives on the skulls, in which sprigs of thyme were inserted, to keep the spirits from troubling the King.* Bowdich's own reaction is on the page — *I never felt so grateful for being born in a civilized country* — and the reader is entitled to it, but the analytic point survives his revulsion and is not softened by it.

This is the state's history, and it is made of bone. A hundred and sixteen years of conquest, from the founder to the reigning king, carried through a crowd once a year by two hundred men, in the physical remains of every ruler the state had beaten. Nobody had to be taught the list. Nobody could dispute it, misremember it, or fail to be present for it. And it was cumulative: each year's additions joined the parade permanently, so that a child who saw it at seven and again at forty saw the same skulls plus the new ones, and understood without being told that this was a thing that had been going on before him and would go on after.

Set that beside the law making it a capital offence to say where any individual's people had been conquered from, and the design becomes visible. **The origin of every person was unspeakable; the origin of the state was performed annually in public with the actual heads.** Those two rules are not in tension. They are the same rule from two ends: no Asante may be reminded that he came from somewhere conquered, and every Asante must be reminded, every September, what happens to those who are not Asante.

The rest of the festival ran the same instruments at lower volume. The chiefs sacrificed slaves at each quarter of the town as they entered; slaves were killed at the royal mausoleum at Bantama over the great brass pan, their blood mixed into what was already in it; chiefs killed slaves so that the blood ran into the hole from which the new yam was lifted, and *Those who cannot afford to kill slaves, take the head of one already sacrificed and place it on the hole.* The scale of that killing is genuinely contested, was systematically exaggerated in nineteenth-century British writing that needed a justification for invasion, and is real; the accounting belongs later in this study and will be done there rather than here.

And Bowdich caught the management. *The royal gold ornaments are melted down every Yam Custom, and fashioned into new patterns, as novel as possible. This is a piece of state policy very imposing on the populace, and the tributary chiefs who pay but an annual*

visit. An outsider naming it as policy, in those words, in 1819: the regalia are re-made annually so that the men who see them once a year see something they have never seen before. That is a deliberate, costly, recurring investment in awe, and it is exactly the kind of avoidable expenditure that tells you what the apex thought it needed to buy.

At the end came purification. The King and the captains went before sunrise to bathe in the river Dah, and *Almost all the inhabitants follow him, and the capital appears deserted.* The next day he washed in the marsh at the edge of the town, laving the water with his own hands over himself, his chairs, his stools and his plate; blood was poured on the stools and door-posts, and *also the stools of the different tribes and families*; the King's fetish men sprinkled sacred water over the chiefs with branches — and here Bowdich records something that no propagandist would have thought to include: *the more superstitious running to have a little poured on their heads, and even on their tongues.* The more superstitious. Not all of them. Even at the climax of the national rite, an observant foreigner could see a spectrum of conviction in the crowd.

Afterwards the four great towns — Nsuta, Mampon, Bekwai and Kokofu — went home and held their own yam customs, having first attended the King's. The instrument replicated all the way down, and Bowdich, reaching for the nearest thing in his own education, said it seemed to have been instituted *like the Panathenaea of Theseus, to unite such various nations by a common festival.* He was right about the function, and it is worth noticing that he arrived at it from Athens without needing an Asante to explain it, which is what convergence looks like from inside a single case.

What a drum does that a book cannot

Twi is a tone language, and the Asante talking drums — the paired *atumpan* — reproduce the tones of speech. The drum does not encode messages in an agreed cipher; it *speaks*, and a listener who knows the language hears words. Horns did the same: Bowdich records that every senior captain had a flourish rendering a short sentence, that the whole army knew every one of them, and that *any Ashantee you may meet walking in the streets* would repeat a chief's phrase on request, though the horn was out of sight and barely audible. The King's own horns said *I pass all Kings in the world*; every night, near midnight, they went to the market place and sounded a strain rendered to him as *King Sai thanks all his captains and all his people for to-day.*

Around that sat a whole professional apparatus of memory: the drummer with his *ayan*, the bards walking behind the Asantehene reciting praise poetry, the constabulary with their referential verses, the court musicians whose repertoire encoded the state's history and its dead. Modern study of these forms describes them, rightly, as the Asante means of recording and storing experience, maintained over centuries with remarkable

consistency and self-consciousness. Asante was not a state without an archive. It was a state whose archive was performed.

That difference is the module's contribution, and it cuts both ways.

A text is a formation instrument with a defect its custodians rarely notice until it costs them. It can be read alone, in silence, by one person, at a time of his choosing. It can be compared with an earlier copy. It can be quoted back at the men who administer it, and it can be quoted against them. Every literate order in this collection has eventually had to deal with somebody who read the founding document more carefully than was convenient. A performed archive has none of these vulnerabilities. There is no private reading, because every transmission is a public event at a time the state sets; there is no earlier copy, because the drummer *is* the copy; and there is no quoting the founder against his successors, because the man reciting the founder's words holds an office in the successor's household. **A text can be turned against the order that issued it. A performance cannot, because the performer is on the payroll.** That is why formation of this kind is not weaker than the literate sort. On the axis that matters most to an apex — contestability — it is markedly stronger.

But the same property is a structural weakness, and the case will demonstrate it. A written archive survives the death of everyone who made it; it can be buried, copied, smuggled and rediscovered. A performed archive lives in trained persons and in the occasions that assemble them. Break the occasion and you have interrupted the transmission; scatter the specialists and you have damaged the record itself. An order whose entire memory is held in living officeholders is an order that can be materially injured by exiling a few dozen men — which is precisely what was attempted at the end, and which is why the ending of this study will have to be read as an attack on a memory system and not only on a government.

The portrait of the good subject

What did all of it install? A reasonably clear figure emerges from the sources, and it is not the figure a European observer of the period expected to find.

The good Asante was, first, a man attached: to a matrilineage whose obligations he discharged, above all at funerals, which were the single largest recurring expense of an ordinary life and the principal occasion on which a man's standing was publicly assessed. He was obedient to his stool, which meant to an office and its ancestors rather than to a person he might privately think a fool. He was brave, in a state whose army was the adult male population and whose recruits were expected to return equipped from the enemy or be *dismissed to some servile occupation*. He was acquisitive without apology — accumulation was honourable, and the man who gathered gold and

dependants and was recognised as *obirempon* had done what a man was supposed to do — but he understood that what he gathered returned to the nation at his death, and, at least until the nineteenth century, appears to have understood that as a settling of accounts rather than a robbery. He was discreet: he did not ask, and did not say, where another man's people had come from. And he was careful with oaths.

That last is the one worth dwelling on, because it is where the formation can actually be measured.

Measuring it: a gloomy silence

The hardest thing a study can attempt is to establish whether a base population believed or merely performed, and mind-reading a subject from the outside is worthless. What can be done is to find an occasion on which the order's own sacred machinery made a demand that cost something to obey and nothing to ignore, and to see what people did.

Asante supplies one, and the record of it is exceptionally good because it was written down by a man who thought the whole thing was superstition.

Asante courts ran a graduated ladder of oaths. Bowdich watched the procedure repeatedly and set out what he saw: an accused man is charged, heard fully, and made to swear before the witnesses are brought in. *The oaths, sometimes four or five, are progressive, generally beginning by the King's foot, or some arbitrary form, and are, apparently, not considered awful or decisive; such perjuries being commutable by fine.* The lower rungs, then, are ordinary legal furniture — everyone knows they are sworn loosely and everyone knows the penalty is money.

Then the ladder steepens. *But when the oath, "by the King's father," is administered, every one looks serious.* And at the top: *if, "by Cormantee and Saturday" is resorted to, there is a gloomy silence; but this is seldom ventured.*

Read what is happening in that courtroom. The great oath invokes the day and the place of the founder's death in the field — the disaster the state had concealed and then made permanent by turning the concealment into a formula. It is available to any litigant. It is the most effective instrument in the room, because it compels a hearing and makes evasion impossible. And it is *seldom ventured*, by the state's own officers, in the state's own court, when using it would win them the case — because the consequences of swearing it wrongly were understood to be beyond anybody's power to commute. Bowdich's eye caught the whole gradient in the behaviour of the room: no reaction at the bottom, seriousness in the middle, a gloomy silence at the top.

That is a measurement, and it is a good one, precisely because it records a cost paid rather than a sentiment expressed. A population merely performing compliance does

not decline to use a decisive weapon it is entitled to use. And it is corroborated by a second observation Bowdich made about the same oath: because the founder had died on a Saturday, *no enterprise has since been undertaken on that day of the week.* An entire state forgoing one day in seven for a century, on account of a fact about a dead king. Whatever that is, it is not a performance for the benefit of an audience, because there was no audience — the only people watching were the ones paying the cost.

The other, larger measurement of this formation is the one everybody knows: that in 1900, after their army had been destroyed twice and their king deported, the Asante went to war over the safety of an object. That test belongs to the account of how the order ended and will be run there. It is worth saying here only that by the time it came, the answer had already been visible for a century in a courtroom, in a silence.

Where the formation stopped

It stopped, and the boundary is legible.

It ran at full strength through the metropolitan states — Kumasi and the towns that had made the union — where the *adae* was kept, the great oath feared, the Odwira attended, and the clan system intact. It ran into the absorbed populations, by design and by law, over a generation or two: this was the whole point of the naturalisation rule, and its success is attested by the fact that a hundred years on nobody could say who in Kumasi had descended from Tafo or Amakom or from a Denkyira captive, because saying so was a capital offence and there was no register to consult.

It stopped at the northern tributaries. Gonja and Dagomba did not attend the Odwira; they sent deputations, and Bowdich lists them as the standing exceptions to a rule admitting none. Their populations were substantially Muslim, they were governed by their own rulers under a Kumasi patron, and nothing whatever was asked of their belief. What was asked of them was tribute and the acknowledgment of a superior. A tributary ruler presenting himself at a Kumasi festival was performing homage under observation, which is a different operation from formation and produces a different kind of subject — one who complies while the enforcer is credible and stops when it is not. When the enforcer failed in 1874, the northern provinces did not have to be persuaded to leave. They simply left.

And it never touched the Muslim establishment in the capital, some three hundred strong under its own head in Dupuis's count, whose members served the court, wrote its Arabic correspondence, and sold its king protective charms without ever being asked to believe that a stool held the soul of the nation. Nobody tried to form them, because there was nothing to be gained by it and something to be lost.

Reading formation against the framework

The framework holds that belief is installed early, by whoever is doing the work, through the levers a mind is built to trust — a marked authority, one's own group, a thing placed beyond calculation, a story absorbed before it can be weighed — and that these are strongest when all of them brace one another. Asante confirms every part of that. The contribution the case makes is about the *medium*, and it is the one the collection has been unable to test until now because every previous case ran partly on text.

Formation without literacy is not weaker; it is less contestable and less durable, and those are one property seen from two sides. A written doctrine can be read privately, compared with earlier versions, and quoted back at the institution that issued it, which is the standing vulnerability of every literate order in this collection and the origin of most of their heresies. An oral order has none of that exposure: the transmission is always public, always at a time the state sets, always in the mouth of a man holding an office. There is no text to read against. But the record is then stored in trained persons and in the assemblies that convene them, so the whole archive is exposed to a kind of attack that a library is not — the exile of specialists and the suppression of occasions. An order of this type is harder to argue with and easier to interrupt.

Two things attach that compound with what the earlier modules established.

The first is that the corpus has probably been over-weighting literacy, and for a reason that should be stated because it is a bias in the method rather than in the world: **literate orders leave the evidence of their own formation, and oral ones leave the evidence only where a foreigner happened to be standing.** Almost everything in this module comes from five months of one Englishman's residence in 1817. Had Bowdich not gone, we would have the festival's existence and none of its content, and a study of Asante would have concluded that its formation was thin because its formation was invisible. That is an instrument error and every case in this collection where the record is oral should be re-read for it.

The second is about what the state chose to make unrepeatable and what it chose to repeat. The founding legislation made the origin of every *person* unspeakable on pain of death; the annual festival made the origin of the *state* unmissable, in the skulls of every king it had beaten. An order that erases individual origins while parading collective ones has understood something exact about how the two levers work: the coalitional lever requires that nobody in the group be markable as an outsider, and the deference lever requires that everybody outside the group be visibly worse off. Both were served at once, by the same state, in the same decade, and neither would have worked without

the other. **Where you find a conquest order suppressing the memory of who was conquered, look for the place it is displaying the memory that conquest happened** — it will be nearby, it will be annual, and it will be aimed at the same people.

A note on sources. Nearly everything concrete in this module comes from a single eyewitness and the reader should weigh it accordingly. T. E. Bowdich, *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee* (London, 1819), digitised text, supplies: the yam planted in December and not eaten until the custom concluded in early September; the compulsory attendance of caboceers, captains and the majority of tributaries, with Gonja and Dagomba excepted and sending deputations; the deferral of accusations against suspected chiefs to the festival; the Saturnalian suspension of law during it; the parade of the skulls of all conquered kings and executed rebel chiefs by two parties of executioners upwards of a hundred each, with the thyme sprigs and the clashed knives; the sacrifices at the quarters of the town, at Bantama, and at the yam hole, including the substitution of an already-severed head by those who could not afford a slave; the annual melting and re-fashioning of the royal gold as *a piece of state policy very imposing on the populace*; the river ablutions and the near-desertion of the capital; the sprinkling of sacred water and *the more superstitious* running to receive it; the separate yam customs of the four great towns and their palatine privileges; the great drum adorned with skulls struck at sunset and the town's answering shout; the great and little *adae* on Sundays and Wednesdays at roughly three-week intervals by his own calculation; the horn flourishes rendered as sentences and recognised by any Asante in the street; the graduated ladder of oaths, the seriousness at *by the King's father* and the gloomy silence at *Cormantee and Saturday*, seldom ventured; and the prohibition on undertaking enterprises on a Saturday. Bowdich was in Kumasi for about five months in 1817 as the agent of a company negotiating for a power that would later invade; he worked through interpreters; he was frankly horrified by much of what he saw and says so; and his account of anything he did not personally witness is what Asante officials chose to tell an Englishman. His comparison of the Odwira to the Panathenaea is his own. Joseph Dupuis, *Journal of a Residence in Ashantee* (London, 1824), supplies the count of about three hundred Muslims at Kumasi under their own head, with the same warnings attaching to him.

Modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited. The structure of the Akan forty-two-day *adaduanan* cycle, the composition of the person, the eighth-day outdooring and day-naming, the blackened stools and the stool-house, and the definition of the *odonko* as kinless and therefore without standing in the political community, follow the standard ethnographic literature deriving from R. S. Rattray and his successors, including Meyer Fortes on kinlessness. The characterisation of the *atumpan* as a speech

surrogate reproducing the tones of Twi rather than encoding an agreed cipher, and the account of *ayan* drum poetry, *kwadwom* bardic recitation and *apae*, follow the ethnomusicological literature, principally J. H. Kwabena Nketia and Kwasi Ampene, whose description of Asante performing arts as sites for recording and storing experience over centuries is paraphrased and not quoted.

The weakest points are these. The age at which each instrument caught a person is largely inferred rather than documented: the outdooring and the clan are attested, the festival calendar is attested, but no source available to me records what an Asante child was actually taught and when, and the portrait of the good subject above is assembled from adult behaviour described by outsiders rather than from any Asante statement of it. The scale of human sacrifice at the Odwira is real, is attested by more than one eyewitness with no need to invent it, and was also systematically inflated in later British writing that required a justification for invasion; no figures are given here and the accounting is deferred. The claim that formation ran thin in the northern tributaries rests on the exemption of Gonja and Dagomba from attendance, on their separate religious establishment, and on what happened after 1874, which is inference from later conduct rather than direct evidence of belief. And the standing limitation of the whole study presses hardest here: an order whose formation was performed rather than written has left the reconstruction of its formation to the one foreigner who happened to be in the square, and the modern reconstructions rest on traditions recorded after the state that performed them had been destroyed.

MODULE 5

Received as a Free Subject

The cost column — why an ordinary man complied in a country he could have walked out of in a morning, run separately for each of the populations who paid

The question, and why this ground makes it hard

Every order has to answer, for every person in it, why he does what he is told. The answer is always some mixture of four things: what he gets, what he believes, what happens to him if he refuses, and whether he can leave. Where the benefits are real and the belief runs deep, the order is cheap and the state can be small. Where the benefits are thin and the belief is shallow, the arrangement has to be held by inflicting cost, and the cost has to be inflicted often enough to be credible.

Asante presents this question in an unusually pure form, because the two conventional answers are both unavailable.

It cannot have been held by daily coercion, because the state had no capacity for daily coercion. There were no garrisons in the districts, no police, no written registers, no standing force at all outside the king's own household troops; the army was the adult male population summoned by chiefs, and it existed only when it was called. And it cannot have been held by closing the exits, because there were no exits to close. Land was so abundant and labour so scarce that a dissatisfied man did not need to organise anything — he needed a machete and a day's walk into forest that no state on earth could have patrolled. The framework's usual instruments for explaining compliance, a credible threat applied continuously and a frontier that cannot be crossed, are both simply absent.

Yet the order held for two centuries, and it held without significant peasant revolt. So something else was doing the work, and running the ledger population by population is the way to find it. There is no single common man here. There are at least nine distinguishable positions, and the answer is different in each.

The free Asante commoner

Start with the ordinary free subject of a metropolitan state — a farmer in the Kumasi hinterland or one of the towns of the union — because his benefit column is much fuller than the shape of the story leads one to expect, and being honest about that is the whole discipline of this module.

He had land for nothing. Bowdich states the rule as law, and it is worth reading twice: *A subject may clear any part of the bush for building a croom, or making a plantation, without paying any thing to the King as lord of the soil; but he must pay a small sum to the possessor of the nearest croom or plantation, through which his path runs.* No rent to the sovereign, no purchase price, no tenancy. In a country where the constraint on production was labour rather than land, a free man's access to the means of subsistence was effectively unlimited and effectively free. Compare that with almost any agrarian order in this collection, where the peasant's fundamental condition is that somebody else owns the ground under him, and the size of the benefit becomes visible.

He had a market. *The government has no power to direct the traders to any particular market*, Bowdich records, *though it interdicts the commerce with any power which may have offended it* — a limitation on state power over ordinary commerce, stated as a rule, with the exception named. He could deal where he liked unless a war was on.

He had courts, and they were not a formality. A subject of a tributary ruler could appeal past that ruler to Kumasi and claim decision by the law of Asante. Accusations were checked: in treason charges *the life of the accuser is at risk as well as that of the accused*, forfeited on the acquittal of the accused, and Bowdich was told by his best authorities that this was regarded as indispensable, because otherwise *envy, spleen, or covetousness would otherwise accumulate*. A man bringing a frivolous suit had to feast the family and friends of the man he had failed to convict. These are real protections and they were designed as protections.

He had a career open to him. Rank went by achievement to a degree that startled European visitors: Bowdich watched the King himself pay the eight-ounce enstoolment fees for two men *very suddenly elevated for extraordinary courage, being too poor to do so*, and then dispatch them to collect tribute so that the commission would set them up. A commoner who accumulated could be recognised as a big man. A captive's grandson could hold office. The ceiling was low but it was not sealed.

And he had the benefit that mattered most, which was not prosperity. **He could not be taken.** In a region whose principal hazard to an ordinary person was capture and sale, being a free subject of Asante meant that no raid would carry you off, because the raiding went outward. Enslavement of an Asante free man was possible, but only by process — debt or crime — and not by the arrival of armed strangers. It is difficult to overstate what that was worth in the eighteenth-century Volta basin, and it is the single largest entry in the benefit column of every free person in this study.

It is also, stated plainly, a protection racket. The danger Asante insured its subjects against was a danger Asante was among the largest producers of. Both of those sentences are true and neither cancels the other; the insurance was genuine and the

premium was paid by people to the north. Legibility is not pardon, and it is not condemnation either. It is the arithmetic.

Against all that, his costs. He owed military service whenever his chief was summoned, in an army that paid no wage and expected him to equip himself off the enemy's dead; the casualties were his and the plunder was mostly other people's. He owed the funeral obligations of his lineage, which were the largest recurring expense of an ordinary life and the principal public measure of a man's standing. He was exposed to a judicial system that generated revenue: palavers were *frequently allowed to sleep even for years... to make the damages sued for, the heavier*, and the interference of the four great captains in a case was *purchased at a most extravagant rate by offenders, whether foreigners or subjects.* He faced a criminal law with an alarming number of capital provisions attached to things that were not obviously crimes — *If any subject picks up gold dropped in the market place, it is death*, because the sweepings of the market belonged to the state; *To be convicted of cowardice is death.* And at his own death, the King was heir to his gold.

On balance, for this man, the arrangement was defensible on its merits, and the evidence that he thought so is that he neither left nor rose. That is not a sentimental conclusion. It is what the ledger says.

The young men of Kumasi

One group inside the free population deserves separating out, because their column was different and they are the people who eventually acted.

The *nkwankwaa* — the young men — were free commoners of the capital and the larger towns, often the junior kin of officeholders, without stools of their own and with no prospect of one. They had the full costs of membership: service, funerals, fines, the escheat of whatever they accumulated. They had thinner benefits, because the land that was free lay outside the town they lived in and the offices that carried income were held for life by men in no hurry to die. And as trade with the coast expanded in the nineteenth century they acquired something new: an alternative model of how a man might get rich, and a place to go and try it.

They are worth flagging here rather than describing at length, because the moment when a group with real grievances and no standing acquires means is not a fact about the cost column. It is a fact about the hierarchy, and it belongs where fracture is priced.

A third every forty days

The mechanism by which a free man became an unfree one is stated by Bowdich in a single sentence and it is the most consequential piece of arithmetic in this module.

Interest of money is 33⅓ per cent. for every forty days, which is accompanied after the first period by a dash of liquor. When the patience of the creditor is exhausted, he seizes the debtor, or even any of his family, as slaves, and they can only be redeemed by the payment.

A third every forty days is upwards of nine periods a year. A debt not cleared in the first period is, on any ordinary run of harvests, never going to be cleared. And what stands behind it is not a court order or a distraint on property but the seizure of persons — the debtor, *or even any of his family.*

That last clause is doing enormous work and it should not be read past. It means the matrilineage was collectively liable for the acts of its members. And collective liability is how a state with no police force acquires one for nothing. The Asantehene had no capacity to watch a village; the village's lineage heads had every capacity to watch their own nephews, and an urgent personal interest in doing so, because a young man's reckless debt or reckless oath could see his aunt's household carried off. The enforcement that the state could not afford was performed, continuously and at close range, by families protecting themselves from their own members.

That is the answer to the puzzle this module opened with, and it is the module's first contribution to the framework. **An order with no daily coercive reach can borrow one by making the kin group answerable for the individual.** Collective liability converts every household into a surveillance and enforcement unit at zero cost to the treasury, and it explains the otherwise inexplicable combination this case presents: a weak apparatus, an open frontier, and a very low rate of defection.

The same instrument had a second edge, and Bowdich caught that too. If a man swore on the King's head that another must kill him — *which is understood to be invoking the King's death if he does not* — the other man had to comply or forfeit his property and generally his life. And Bowdich adds that *This very frequently occurs*, because men *in their ardor for revenge, do not regard sacrificing their own lives to bring a palaver on their murderer, which their families are sure to do.* Read as a cost-column entry, this is remarkable: the ordinary man's most effective weapon against a more powerful enemy was to compel his own death in a manner that would ruin the killer. It is the weapon of somebody with nothing else, and its existence tells you both that ordinary people had a real instrument and what it cost to use.

The people who were the wealth

Below the free subject lay three conditions that must be kept apart, because the ledgers are not remotely the same.

The pawn — *awowa* — was a free person pledged as security for a debt, working for the creditor in lieu of interest, redeemable on repayment, retaining his lineage and his standing. Pawning was an ordinary and regulated credit instrument, not a punishment; the colonial government did not prohibit it until 1908. For the pawn, the cost was his labour and his liberty of movement; the benefit was that his kin got the loan and he kept his identity; and exit meant redemption, which was a normal event. He was not a slave, and everybody involved knew the difference.

The Asante-born household slave was in a different position again, and one that European observers persistently misdescribed by importing a plantation model that did not apply. He worked in a household, alongside its free members, in the same tasks; he could marry, hold property, and in some cases accumulate; his children were absorbed towards the lineage of his master; the chief slave of a stool stood in the line of succession to it, and Bowdich records that on the coast the principal slave succeeded to the exclusion of the son. Above all, the law making it a capital offence to disclose anyone's origins meant that within two or three generations the descent was not merely forgotten but unmentionable. That is a real path out, and it was travelled.

But the ceiling was not a formality either, and the sentence that fixes his position is Bowdich's flattest: *No man is punished for killing his own slave, but he is for the murder of his wife or child.* Whatever his prospects, he had no standing against the man who owned him. The assimilation was genuine and it was a process, not a status; while it was incomplete, he was property.

The newly purchased captive — the *odonko*, bought from the northern trade — occupied the worst position that was not death. He was kinless by definition, in a society where kinlessness was the definition of nothing: no lineage to answer for him, no one to avenge or redeem him, no ancestors to become, no burial. He spoke another language, bore facial marks that identified him as foreign, and had no standing whatever. His benefit column contained one entry, and it was the prospect of his grandchildren being indistinguishable from anybody else. Everything else was cost.

For him, exit was the one thing that looks, on the map, as though it should have worked, and did not. He was in an open forest with no fence and no patrol. He was also five hundred miles from a home he could not have found, in a country where every stranger without kin was, by definition, catchable — and where the next polity along was organised on the same principle. He did not run because there was nowhere to arrive.

The *akyere*

One category has to be stated separately because nothing else in the order resembles it.

The *akyere* were persons — convicted criminals, some war captives, some given up by their own communities in settlement of obligations — condemned to death and held, sometimes for years, against the occasion on which a death would be required: a royal funeral, a great festival, the consecration of an object. They were kept, fed and worked in the meantime; Rattray records that some of good conduct were spared indefinitely, and that a proportion were sent to the king's farms and plantations.

Their cost column has no other entries and their exit was zero. There is no analysis to do here beyond stating what the position was, and refusing both of the available evasions: that the practice can be dissolved into a religious category and thereby made not a killing, and that it can be inflated into the whole character of the order and thereby made the only thing worth saying about it. It was a standing reserve of human beings maintained for the purpose of being killed on schedule. The numbers are contested, were systematically inflated in the British writing that wanted a reason to invade, and are real. The accounting belongs later in this study and will be done there.

The inner provinces

Move outward to the conquered forest states — Denkyira, Akyem, Assin, Wassa, Sefwi, Twifo — whose subjects were not Asante but were not distant either.

Their rulers kept their stools and their internal government; their people kept their land, their clans and their courts; and they acquired the right to appeal past their own chief to Kumasi. Their costs were tribute, military service in the front rank of Asante armies, and the standing knowledge that a rising would be answered by the destruction of the offending state and by the reduction of their blood-price relative to whichever neighbouring province helped suppress them.

That last provision deserves emphasis, because it is the cheapest and nastiest device in the settlement. A tributary that distinguished itself in putting down another's revolt was rewarded by having the offender's people legally devalued: if a subject of the loyal state killed a subject of the punished one, only the price of a slave was recoverable instead of the fine for a freeman. So each province's price of non-compliance was set not only by Kumasi's army but by its neighbours' appetite for the discount. The commoner in an inner province was watched by the province next door, which had a schedule of gains from watching him.

His benefit column held two real items. The great roads and the peace on them, which made trade possible over distances that had previously been impassable to anyone without an army. And, again, non-enslaveability: a subject of a tributary state within the empire was not raiding material, which his grandfather had been.

His belief column was close to empty. Nothing in the record suggests the conquered forest states developed a conviction that Kumasi's supremacy was rightful. They complied because the army was credible and because the alternative was to be the state made an example of. The test of that came in 1874, and they passed it in the way that shows the column had been empty all along: the moment the floor failed, they went.

The tributary north, and the people beyond it

Furthest out lay Gonja and Dagomba, Muslim states conquered in the 1730s and 1740s, retaining their own rulers, their own religion and their own law, exempted even from attending the Odwira in person — Bowdich lists them as the standing exceptions to a rule admitting none — and required to send deputations, taxes and, above all, people.

The figures for the Dagomba tribute are contested and I will not pretend otherwise: annual renders of two hundred, five hundred, and two thousand slaves all appear in the literature, together with a detailed schedule of five hundred slaves, two hundred cattle, four hundred sheep and quantities of cloth that is attributed to Dupuis in the secondary literature and which I have not been able to locate in his text. Take the range as two hundred to two thousand annually and note that even the low figure, sustained across a century, is an enormous number of people.

The point that matters is what a tribute denominated in human beings does to the society that owes it. Neither Gonja nor Dagomba could supply that quota from its own subjects without destroying itself. So they raided outward, into the stateless and small-scale societies beyond them — the peoples of the Volta basin's northern reaches, Kasena, Sisala, Builsa, Frafra and their neighbours — and converted an obligation to Kumasi into an annual man-hunt among communities that had never seen an Asante.

This is where the cost column bottoms out, and it is on people who were not subjects of the empire at all. They received nothing. They believed nothing, because nobody asked them to. Their price of non-compliance was not set by Kumasi and could not be negotiated with Kumasi, because their relationship with Kumasi was mediated entirely through the men sent to catch them. And their exit was the only genuinely available exit in this study, and they took it: dispersal into defensible terrain, settlement patterns built for concealment, the abandonment of open country. An order's costs do not stop at the edge of its map. Asante's fell hardest a hundred miles

beyond it, on populations that appear in no Asante account because they were not part of the polity in any sense except as its raw material.

Exit: the forest that was not a door

Which brings the module to the variable that ought, on this terrain, to have destroyed the arrangement, and did not.

The physical conditions for exit were as favourable as they get. No walls. No passes. No registers. No garrisons. Continuous forest, a subsistence crop any man could plant, and a state that could not police a village on a good day. By every measure the framework normally applies — distance, terrain, pursuit capacity, the cost of recapture — the ordinary Asante was among the freest-to-leave subjects in this collection.

He did not leave, and the reason is that leaving was not exit. A man who walked into the bush had not escaped to anywhere. He had converted himself from a person with a lineage into a person without one, which in that world was not a reduction in status but the abolition of status; and he had done it in a region where every polity within reach was organised the same way and treated the unattached stranger as capturable. The forest was not a door. It was the condition of being catchable, with the additional feature that no one would come looking for you.

The clinching evidence is the rule that runs the other way, and it gives this module its title. Bowdich records the Asante law on fugitives: *If a slave seeks refuge from an ally or tributary, he is restored; if from an unconnected power, he is received as a free subject.*

Read what that establishes. Exit *worked* — for people running into Asante from outside the system, because at the far end of their journey there was a receiving structure that would give them a place. It did not work for people running out, because at the far end of that journey there was nothing. The same forest, the same distances, the same absence of pursuit; entirely different outcomes, decided not by the terrain but by what was waiting on the other side.

And there is a natural experiment. When a differently-organised receiving structure did appear to the south — a British protectorate over the coastal states, consolidating from the 1830s and decisively after 1874 — people moved, in numbers, and kept moving: not only slaves and pawns but wealthy men removing themselves and their capital out of reach of the death duties. Nothing about the terrain had changed. What had changed was that there was now somewhere to arrive.

So the second contribution of this module: exit is not a property of the terrain, it is a property of the destination. The framework has tended to score exit by asking whether a person can physically get away and whether he will be pursued. Asante is the case where both answers are yes and there is nonetheless no exit at all, because the

region was monocultural in its social technology and an unattached person was prey everywhere in it. The test should therefore be: *not can he leave, but will anywhere receive him as anything other than property?* Where the answer is no, an open frontier is not an escape route. It is a holding pen with no fence, and the state gets the compliance without paying for the wall.

Reading the cost column against the framework

The framework holds that where benefit is thin and belief shallow, an order must inflict a great deal of cost to hold its people, and that the amount of coercion an order needs is the measure of how little it is giving and how little it is believed. Asante confirms the principle and complicates the accounting in three ways, each of which compounds with what the earlier modules established.

The first is the borrowed police force. A state with no capacity for daily coercion made the lineage collectively liable for the individual — for his debts by law, for his oaths by custom, for his conduct by the simple fact that his creditors could seize his aunt. That transfers the entire cost and labour of routine enforcement onto the one institution in the society with universal reach, permanent presence, and a powerful private motive to perform it. **Where an apex lacks an administrative reach into the village, look for a collective-liability rule; it will be there, and it is the substitute.** This also resolves the tension between Module 1's finding — that this floor could destroy armies but could not stand over a district — and the observed absence of peasant revolt. The floor did not have to stand over the district. The family did.

The second is that the benefit column was not thin, and its principal entry was of a kind the framework has not been scoring. Membership of Asante did not chiefly deliver prosperity, security of tenure, or justice, though it delivered some of each. It delivered **non-enslaveability** in a region where the ordinary person's dominant risk was capture. That is a benefit of the first magnitude which costs the supplying state almost nothing, because it is produced as a by-product of the same wars that generate its revenue — and it is, in the strict sense, protection sold against a danger the seller manufactures. The general form is worth carrying: **where a conquest order's principal export is human beings, its principal domestic benefit is exemption from being one, and the two are the same operation seen from inside and outside the boundary.** That is why the benefit column of a slaving state can be genuinely full for its own commoners while the total ledger is catastrophic, and why counting only the subjects gets the wrong answer.

The third is the destination test set out above, and it has a corollary the collection should carry. If exit depends on a receiving structure rather than on terrain, then **the**

appearance of a differently-organised neighbour is a shock to an order's cost column even if that neighbour never fires a shot. Nothing about Asante's internal arrangements changed when a protectorate consolidated on the coast. But every calculation made by every dissatisfied person in the country changed, because for the first time in two centuries there was an answer to the question of where you would go. That is a mechanism of erosion that operates before any war and independently of any war, and it is the one to watch when this study reaches the ending.

Finally, the honest summary of the whole ledger. For a free Asante commoner in a metropolitan state, the arrangement was defensible and he defended it. For a conquered forest subject it was tolerable and unbelieved, and he left the moment leaving became possible. For a first-generation captive it was almost pure cost with a distant exit through his grandchildren. For the *akyere* it was cost with no exit whatever. And for the peoples beyond the northern tributaries — who were not in the empire, were owed nothing by it, and were never asked to believe anything about it — it was an annual harvest. **The further from Kumasi, the emptier the benefit column and the heavier the cost, until at the outer edge there are only costs and the people paying them are not subjects at all.** An order is not adequately described by the ledger of the people inside it. It is described by the whole ledger, and the whole ledger includes the people it went out to fetch.

A note on sources. The exact quotations are from T. E. Bowdich, *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee* (London, 1819), digitised text: the subject's right to clear any bush without payment to the King as lord of the soil; the government's lack of power to direct traders to a particular market; the risk to the accuser's life in treason charges and the reason given for it; the entertainment owed by a frivolous accuser; the King paying enstoolment fees for two poor men elevated for courage; palavers allowed to sleep to inflate damages; the purchase of the great captains' interference; the death penalty for picking up gold in the market place and for conviction of cowardice; the interest rate of a third every forty days and the seizure of the debtor or any of his family; the oath on the King's head compelling a killing, and Bowdich's observation that it very frequently occurred; the rule that no man is punished for killing his own slave; the succession of the principal slave to a stool; and the fugitive rule that gives this module its title. Bowdich was in Kumasi about five months in 1817, working through interpreters, as agent of a company negotiating for a power that later invaded; his statements of Asante law are an outsider's summary of an unwritten system and are used as such.

Modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited. The land-abundance and labour-scarcity conditions, the absence of a capacity for daily coercion at grassroots level, the

character of pawning as a regulated credit instrument prohibited only in 1908, and the analysis of Asante slavery against the plantation model, follow Gareth Austin. The account of the *nkwankwaa* and of nineteenth-century commercial pressure on the accumulating classes follows T. C. McCaskie. The observation that some *akyere* of good conduct were spared and that a proportion were set to work on the king's farms is R. S. Rattray's, reached here through the comparative literature on Asante and Dahomean slavery rather than from Rattray directly. The definition of the *odonko* as kinless and therefore without political standing follows Meyer Fortes as used in that literature.

The weakest evidence is flagged where it appears and repeated here. The Dagomba tribute figures are irreconcilable across the sources — two hundred, five hundred and two thousand slaves annually are all given — and the frequently cited detailed schedule attributed to Dupuis could not be located in his text; the range is given and no single figure is adopted. The identification of the specific northern peoples raided to fill the tribute rests on the secondary literature and on later ethnography rather than on any contemporary record, and the scale of that raiding is not quantified here because I have found no figure I would stand behind. The claim that belief was close to absent in the inner conquered provinces is an inference from their conduct after 1874, not direct evidence about what anyone thought before it. And the standing limitation of this study bears with particular force on a module about ordinary people: not one line of what an Asante commoner, a pawn, a household slave or a condemned *akyere* thought about any of this survives in his own words, and every ledger above has been reconstructed from law reported by foreigners, from what people did, and from what they declined to do.

MODULE 6

The People Buy Gold and Ivory Only

Extraction — the seven heads of revenue, a tribute schedule that is a map of which populations were destroyed, and the year the empire reached its market and the market closed

The one rule that governed all of it

Before the schedules, the principle, because an English visitor who spent five months talking to the man who kept the treasury reduced it to a single sentence and there is no improving on it. Having listed what he could of the tributes, Bowdich wrote that they were *in some instances fixed, but more frequently indefinite, being proportioned to the exigencies of the year* — and then, from his conversations with Apokoo the treasurer and from watching state palavers, drew the conclusion: *it appeared that the necessities and the designs of the Ashantee government were the superior considerations, and the rule in levying tribute every where.*

The necessities and the designs. Not a rate, not a schedule, not a customary quantum a province could point to and say it had paid. What Kumasi needed, when it needed it.

Hold that against the extraction regimes elsewhere in this collection, which are almost invariably fixed by statute, published as a schedule, and administered by officials who can be audited against it — and notice that the reason for the difference is the same reason there was no charter of settlement and no legal fiction. An extraction that must be justified to a distant capital has to be legible, predictable and defensible, because the capital's own belief in its own lawfulness is one of the things being maintained. An extraction that answers to nobody has no such requirement. And unpredictability is not merely the absence of a schedule; it is itself a second extraction, because a province that cannot know what it owes cannot plan, cannot hedge, cannot accumulate a reserve against the demand, and can never argue that it has paid enough.

Seven heads of revenue

Bowdich could not calculate the whole and said so — *I cannot pretend to calculate the variable revenue of Ashantee, nor indeed to report its optional sources* — but he noted particulars, and the particulars are the best reconstruction of a pre-colonial West African state's revenue that exists in a single contemporary text.

First, the dust gold of the dead and the disgraced. The King was heir to the gold of every subject, and the confiscation extended beyond death to disgrace: Bowdich records that Boiteem, father of the linguist Otee, left *five jars (said to hold about four gallons each) and two flasks*, and that on the disgrace of Appia Nanu *three jars were seized.* Four-gallon jars of gold dust, seized on a political reverse. This is not a tax on estates. It is the state's principal capital account, replenished by mortality and by the fall of ministers.

Second, the trade taxes. *A tax in gold upon all slaves purchased for the coast* — and *Customs paid in gold by all traders returning from the coast, levied near Ansa in Assin.* A duty at the point of sale and a duty at the toll gate on the road home.

Third, a tax on the elephant hunters, which is the ivory revenue.

Fourth and fifth, the goldfields. The small pits at Soko *were reported to yield, sometimes 2,000 ounces per month, at others not more than 700*, and there were the daily washings throughout Denkyira and the hills dividing Akyem and Assin, which he was told were very rich.

Sixth, a seigniorage on ornament. *A tax on every chief increasing the number of his gold ornaments. Apokoo paid 20 periguins to the King on melting 100* — twenty per cent on the working of gold into display, levied on the men whose display was the point.

Seventh, and this is the one that explains a capital offence: *The soil of the market place has been washed but twice during the present reign. I was told it produced about 800 ounces of gold each time.* Gold dust spilled in the ordinary course of a day's trading settled into the ground of the Kumasi market, and the state harvested it periodically as a crop. Bowdich watched the mechanism protected in real time — *During our stay a heavy rain washed down a large quantity, which was replaced and carefully covered with the soil, by the Captain in charge of the market place. It was very easily seen after rain.* And the law recorded elsewhere in his book now makes sense as something other than caprice: *If any subject picks up gold dropped in the market place, it is death.* The dirt of the marketplace was a state asset with an officer in charge of it, and gleaning was theft from the treasury.

To these must be added the judicial revenue, which does not appear in his list because it was not thought of as revenue: fines, the deliberate ageing of suits to inflate damages, the sale of the great captains' influence, and a peredwan of gold to each superior captain *for every oath the King exacts of them.* And the fees of office — eight ounces to the royal household on a captain's enstoolment.

A tribute schedule, and what it is a map of

The tributes proper Bowdich set down as memoranda, and they repay reading as a table of what each province had rather than as a list of what each province owed.

Gonja and Dagomba, he notes, *never pay in gold, which though plentiful from commerce, is not found there, cowries being the circulating medium.* Their assessment therefore ran in other things, and the schedule is exact: from each capital and *all their large towns*, annually, **five hundred slaves, two hundred cows, four hundred sheep, four hundred cotton cloths, two hundred of cotton and silk** — with the smaller towns taxed in proportion. Takyiman rendered a smaller quantity of the same kinds. Nkoranza was *generally excused, from fidelity, and a long series of military services.*

Where there was gold, the tribute was gold. Wassa paid two hundred peredwans a year; a place Bowdich renders Moinse'an, fifty bendas; Gyaman a hundred peredwans annually *besides all large pieces of rock gold* — the nuggets reserved to the overlord, the dust left to the diggers. Akyem, Assin, Wassa and Aowin were *taxed indefinitely by crooms*, town by town, at whatever the year required.

Read the two halves of that schedule together and the sorting becomes visible, and it is not the sorting the framework usually finds. Extraction here was not graded by the status of the payer — there was no poll tax, no head tax, no differential rate for conquered as against founding populations inside the metropolitan states, and no caste in the assessment at all. It was graded by **endowment**: each province paid in whatever it had. The forest states with gold under them paid gold. The savanna states with cattle and weaving paid cattle and cloth. And the savanna states without gold, whose currency was cowries and whose exportable surplus was thin, paid in the only asset they had left.

That is the finding, and it should be stated without softening. **A tribute denominated in human beings is a statement that the tributary has nothing else, and a tribute schedule is therefore a map of which populations will be destroyed.** Five hundred people a year from each large town is not a quota Gonja or Dagomba could meet out of their own subjects without dissolving themselves, so they met it by raiding outward into the small-scale societies beyond them and converting an obligation to Kumasi into an annual man-hunt among people who had never seen an Asante. The empire's demand was for value. The periphery's poverty converted the demand into flesh. Nobody in Kumasi had to decide that the Kasena or the Sisala should be hunted; the schedule decided it, by arithmetic, from four hundred miles away.

The machinery

The collection ran on a small number of men, a very large number of cowrie shells, and no writing at all.

Each subject state was placed under a Kumasi chief, generally resident in the capital, who *seldom visited it but to receive the tribute from the native ruler, for whose conduct he was in a reasonable degree responsible.* The men sent to collect took two peredwans in every ten — a twenty per cent commission, which is also why sending a newly-promoted poor man to collect tribute was, as Bowdich saw, the standard way of setting him up in life.

At the centre sat Apokoo, keeper of the treasury, sole holder of the key to the apartment where the tributes were stored separately, and presiding daily over what Bowdich calls an exchequer court at his own house, attended by two of the King's linguists and the state insignia, deciding all cases affecting tribute or revenue, with appeal to the King seldom resorted to. He conducted it reclining on a bed of cushions with two or three of his handsomest wives beside him, and he kept the accounts in his head. *Numerous and various as the sums are, he disposes of them by a local association which is said to be infallible with him, for the Moorish secretary only records the greater political events.* The Muslim scribe was employed on politics, not money. **The entire revenue of the empire was held in one man's memory**, assisted by cowries: *I observed that all calculations were made, explained, and recorded, by cowries.*

That arrangement has a property worth noticing. An unwritten treasury cannot be audited by anyone but its keeper, which makes the keeper structurally irreplaceable and gives him a form of security no grant could confer. It also means the state's fiscal memory dies with him. And it fixes a limit on how large and how complicated the extraction can become, which is one plausible reason why an empire of this size never developed the schedule its size would seem to require.

Bowdich also recorded the exchange rate the treasury itself used. Satisfied that a public debtor genuinely could not pay in gold, Apokoo *commuted sixteen ounces of gold, for twenty men slaves.* Rather under an ounce of gold per man, set by the state, in its own court, as an equivalence — which is the plainest available statement of what the extraction was actually made of.

Two markets, and the flip

Now the wider frame, because Asante's extraction sat between two demand systems and the balance between them moved twice.

The northern trade was the older. Kola out of the forest to the Muslim savanna, where alcohol was forbidden and kola was not; gold north to the desert edge; and southward in return came cloth, leather, livestock, cowries, and slaves. Salaga in Gonja became the great entrepôt of it, and Osei Kwadwo stationed officials there and at Buipe and Yendi to tax the transactions.

The southern trade began in 1471 and ran, for its first century and a half, in the direction nobody expects: the Gold Coast was a net **importer** of enslaved people, bought by the Portuguese at Benin and São Tomé and sold at Elmina to Akan merchants *for gold*, because a forest economy short of hands would pay in the metal Europe had crossed an ocean to get. The flow reversed in the seventeenth century with the American plantations, and it reversed hard. By 1726 a Dutch employee could remark that gold had grown so scarce that the Gold Coast ought to be renamed the Slave Coast. Over the eighteenth century the transatlantic database records embarkations of some 168,000 at Anomabo, 100,000 at Cape Coast and 86,000 at Elmina — figures for those ports, not a measure of Asante's supply specifically, but an indication of the scale of the market Asante's wars were feeding into.

Nothing about the people at either end of this had changed between the two periods. The price had changed. That is the single most important thing to hold about the whole subject, and it is why neither of the sentimental readings survives contact with the record.

Asante's own position in that market needs stating precisely, because it is frequently got wrong in both directions. Asante was not a slave-raiding state in the sense of a polity that went out to catch people for sale; nor was it an innocent bystander that merely taxed a trade others ran. It was a conquest state whose wars produced captives in very large numbers as a by-product, which then had to be disposed of; and it was the fiscal authority astride the routes, taking a duty on every slave purchased for the coast and a customs charge on every trader coming back. It sold, and it taxed the selling, and the two revenues were separable.

1807

In 1807 two things happened, and the coincidence is so exact that it has to be set down flatly and left to speak.

Over the preceding two years Asante had finally broken through to the sea. The pursuit of two fugitive Assin chiefs led the army into Fante country; the Fante middlemen who had stood between Kumasi and the forts for a century were beaten; the Asante reached Anomabo and Cape Coast, and the British governor at Anomabo handed over one of the fugitives. After a hundred and six years of fighting southward,

the state that had been built on the trade to the coast had at last reached the coast on its own terms.

In the same year the British Parliament abolished the trade.

That is the hinge of this study and it deserves its plainness. Asante acquired the position in the year the position lost its principal value. It had spent a century and an enormous number of lives fighting through the middlemen to reach a market, and arrived to find that the largest carrier in that market had withdrawn.

What Osei Bonsu said about it

Thirteen years later the Asantehene raised the subject himself with the British consul at Kumasi, and what he said is the most valuable single passage in the sources for this study, because it is the supplier's own analysis of the repricing, given in his own words, at length, and written down by a man who was not enjoying the conversation.

He opened by describing the change as he had experienced it: *A long time ago the great king liked plenty of trade, more than now; then many ships came, and they bought ivory, gold, and slaves; but now he will not let the ships come as before, and the people buy gold and ivory only.* Then the question: *so now tell me truly, like a friend, why does the king do so?* Dupuis replied that he had no authority to discuss it. The king was not deflected — *I only want to hear what you think as a friend: this is not like the other palavers* — and Dupuis admits he was *confessedly at a loss for an argument that might pass as a satisfactory reason.*

Osei Bonsu did not believe the humanitarian explanation, and he did not accept that abolition would reduce warfare. He then made three arguments in succession, and each is worth having exactly.

The argument from religious authority: *the white men who go to council with your master, and pray to the great God for him, do not understand my country, or they would not say the slave trade was bad. But if they think it bad now, why did they think it good before. Is not your law an old law, the same as the Crammo law? Do you not both serve the same God, only you have different fashions and customs?*

The argument from what a war is: *I cannot make war to catch slaves in the bush, like a thief. My ancestors never did so. But if I fight a king, and kill him when he is insolent, then certainly I must have his gold, and his slaves, and the people are mine too.* He is drawing a distinction he plainly regards as fundamental — between the raider and the conqueror — and asserting that captives are an incident of sovereignty rather than the object of an expedition.

The argument from what the Europeans had themselves done: *Do not the white kings act like this?* — followed by the observation that white men had come in great

ships, fought and killed many people, and taken the gold and slaves to the white country.

And then the accounting, in the first person, of the Gyaman war: *I killed Dinkera, and took his gold, and brought more than 20,000 slaves to Coomassy. Some of these people being bad men, I washed my stool in their blood for the fetische. But then some were good people, and these I sold or gave to my captains: many, moreover, died, because this country does not grow too much corn like Sarem, and what can I do? Unless I kill or sell them, they will grow strong and kill my people.*

The three dispositions in that sentence are the extraction's whole logic laid bare: killed for the stool, sold or given away, or dead of hunger because the forest could not feed them. And the constraint he names — that a victorious army cannot hold twenty thousand captives in a country that does not grow enough corn — is the reason a conquest state of this kind must find a market or a grave for its winnings, and cannot simply keep them.

He closed with an offer. *Now you must tell my master that these slaves can work for him, and if he wants 10,000 he can have them.*

Thirteen years after abolition, to the representative of the abolishing power, the Asantehene offered ten thousand people. The demand had gone. The supply had not.

What actually happened to the ledger

The obvious inference from 1807 is that abolition should have devastated Asante's revenue, and it is worth being careful here because the obvious inference is substantially wrong, and understanding why is the point of the module.

Four things cushioned it.

The state's cut was a tax, not a monopoly. Asante's fiscal interest in the Atlantic trade lay chiefly in duties on slaves purchased for the coast and customs on returning traders. A tax on a trade shrinks with the trade, but it does not carry the capital loss that a state trading on its own account would suffer.

The northern market was large and growing. The Sokoto jihad began in 1804 and produced, over the following decades, an expanding Muslim polity whose demand for kola was enormous — and kola grew only in the forest. Slaves also sold north. The road to Salaga did not close in 1807; it thickened.

Gold and ivory remained, and the Asantehene's own sentence records their survival: *the people buy gold and ivory only.* Those were the trades the coast had originally come for, and they resumed their former prominence.

And most consequentially, in a labour-scarce economy a slave who cannot be exported is not a loss. He is an asset with a high reservation value. Land was free and

hands were scarce; captives who could no longer be sold south were retained, and set to mining gold, carrying kola, clearing forest and farming. This is the mechanism Gareth Austin's work traces in detail, and it produces the conclusion that ought to be uncomfortable for the abolitionist account and is nonetheless what the evidence shows: **the closing of the export market did not reduce slavery in Asante; it deepened it.** The people who would have been shipped stayed, and were worked.

So the fiscal shock was real but survivable, and the order did not have to reprice itself in the way a state dependent on a single export would have had to. What 1807 did instead was something less measurable and more damaging in the long run: **it removed the reason for the coast while leaving Asante committed to holding it.** The southern position had been fought for as a commercial prize. From 1807 it was a political liability — a frontier facing a power whose stated purpose was now the suppression of the traffic that had justified the frontier, garrisoned by forts that increasingly served as places of refuge for Asante's own runaways, and connected to Kumasi by a road along which the coastal states could be encouraged to think about independence. Every conflict in the following seventy years grew out of that. The empire had reached its market and then had to defend an approach to a market that no longer existed.

Reading extraction against the framework

The framework expects extraction to be sorted — that a conquest order takes different things, at different rates, from populations it has classified differently, and that the classification is legible in the assessment. Asante sorts, but not by classification, and the correction matters.

There was no caste in this assessment. No head tax, no poll tax, no differential rate between founding and conquered populations, no legal category of taxable person; and there could not have been, in an order whose founding statute made it a capital offence to say who had been conquered. What there was instead was **sorting by endowment**: every province paid in whatever it had, at whatever the year required. And the consequence is the module's principal contribution, which is a rule about where the worst of an empire's extraction lands.

Where tribute is assessed by endowment rather than by rate, the poorest province pays in people, and the tribute schedule becomes a map of which populations will be destroyed. Gonja and Dagomba had no gold; they had cattle, cloth and access to weaker neighbours; so their bill came due in human beings, and they paid it by hunting societies that owed Kumasi nothing and had never been conquered by it. Nobody at the centre had to intend this. The endowment did the

intending. And it means that the most violent operation in the whole imperial system was carried out four hundred miles from the capital, by tributaries, against non-subjects, in satisfaction of an arithmetic that no Asante ever had to look at. **An extraction system's worst effects are not necessarily where its worst intentions are, and looking only at the metropole's ledger will systematically miss them.**

Two further results attach and both compound with earlier findings.

The first extends the no-metropole rule. The settlement produced no charter because there was no audience with recourse to show one to; the extraction produced no schedule for the same reason. *The necessities and the designs of the Ashantee government were the superior considerations, and the rule in levying tribute every where.* An extraction accountable to nobody is not merely heavier — it is **structurally unpredictable, and the unpredictability is part of the take**, because it denies the payer the ability to plan against the demand or to establish that he has satisfied it. Where the corpus finds a published rate, it should now read that rate as evidence of an audience the extracting power had to satisfy, and where it finds no rate at all, it should look for the absence of one.

The second is about what abolition does to a slaving state, and it bears directly on the question this study exists to answer. **A slaving state whose own economy is labour-scarce cannot be bankrupted by the closure of its export market, because the commodity has a high domestic reservation value.** Asante had free land and no hands; a captive who could not be sold at Anomabo could dig gold at Soko or carry kola to Salaga. The export trade's suppression therefore did not liberate anybody — it redirected them, and enlarged the servile population inside the country. That is not a paradox and it is not an argument against abolition; it is what happens when a market is closed on one side of a boundary and the underlying scarcity on the other side is untouched. It also fixes the order's trajectory for the century that follows: an empire holding a coast it no longer needed, financing itself increasingly from the north and from its own soil, and putting the people it could no longer sell to work at home.

A note on sources. The revenue reconstruction is taken from T. E. Bowdich, *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee* (London, 1819), digitised text, and quoted exactly: his disclaimer about the variable revenue; the seven heads, including the jars of Boiteem and the three seized from Appia Nanu, the tax on slaves purchased for the coast and the customs levied near Ansa in Assin, the tax on elephant hunters, the yields at Soko of between 700 and 2,000 ounces monthly, the washings in Denkyira and the Akyem–Assin hills, Apokoo's twenty peredwans on melting a hundred, and the market-place soil at about 800 ounces per washing with the captain in charge replacing what the rain exposed; the rule that levying followed the necessities and designs of the government;

the tribute schedules for Gonja and Dagomba, Takyiman, Nkoranza, Wassa, Gyaman and the indefinitely taxed forest provinces; the collectors' commission of two peredwans in ten; Apokoo's exchequer court, his memory-kept accounts, the Moorish secretary confined to political events, the calculations in cowries, and the commutation of sixteen ounces of gold for twenty male slaves. This module locates in Bowdich the detailed tribute schedule that the secondary literature commonly attributes to Dupuis and which I could not find in Dupuis's text; Bowdich's version is *per capital and large town*, with smaller towns in proportion, which reconciles the otherwise irreconcilable figures of two hundred, five hundred and two thousand slaves annually that circulate in the literature. Bowdich's warnings stand: five months, interpreters, an agent of a company negotiating for a power that would invade, and figures he presents as memoranda rather than accounts.

The exchange with Osei Bonsu is from Joseph Dupuis, *Journal of a Residence in Ashantee* (London, 1824), digitised text, quoted at length because its exact wording is the evidence. Dupuis was British consul at Kumasi, spoke Arabic, and recorded the conversation through his linguist and then in English; he was negotiating a treaty his own superiors at Cape Coast repudiated and he published with a case to make against them, which gave him a strong interest in presenting the Asantehene as a reasonable sovereign whom the coast administration had needlessly antagonised. The words are given as he set them down and are not a transcript; they passed through at least one interpreter and one interested editor. That said, nothing in Dupuis's quarrel with the governor is served by having the king demand to know why the trade was stopped, or offer ten thousand people, and the passage is used here for what it is: the closest thing that survives to the Asante apex explaining its own extraction.

Willem Bosman's *New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea* (1705 English edition) underlies the account of the earlier trade. Modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited: the retention and internal redeployment of slaves after abolition, the labour-scarcity that gave them a high domestic reservation value, and the consequent deepening rather than diminution of slavery within Asante, follow Gareth Austin; the sixteenth-century importation of captives into the Gold Coast in exchange for gold, and the seventeenth-century reversal, follow the standard economic histories of the region; the stationing of Asante officials at Salaga, Buipe and Yendi under Osei Kwadwo follows the literature on the northern trade.

Figures are given as ranges or as attributions wherever the record permits nothing firmer. The eighteenth-century embarkation totals for Anomabo, Cape Coast and Elmina are database estimates for those ports and are not a measure of Asante's supply, which cannot be separated out. The Soko yields, the market-place washings and the

tribute schedules are what Bowdich was told or observed, once, in 1817, and should not be treated as series. No aggregate for Asante's revenue is offered here because none can be constructed: the treasury kept no books, and the one man who could have supplied the total kept it in his head.

MODULE 7

I Must Have the Books

Information and suppression — the men licensed to speak, the eight roads that were also the eyes, and what an illiterate sovereign understood perfectly well about paper

The state that could not be leaked

Begin with the negative facts, because they define the problem this order did not have.

There was no press, so there was nothing to license and nothing to shut. There were no pamphlets, no broadsheets, no clandestine copies passed between houses. There was no correspondence, so there was nothing to intercept. There were no public records, so there was nothing to falsify and nothing to consult. There was no literate class outside a small body of Muslim scribes who served the court and wrote in a language nobody else at Kumasi could read. An Asante subject with a grievance, a fact and a wish to spread it had one instrument, which was his mouth, and one venue, which was in front of other people.

An order in that position is, by the standards of every literate case in this collection, unleakable. The characteristic failure mode of a censorship regime — the document that escapes, the copy that survives, the letter read by the wrong person — cannot occur where documents do not exist. And yet Asante ran an elaborate, expensive and violent apparatus for controlling who knew what. The question this module has to answer is what that apparatus was for, given that the obvious dangers were absent.

The answer is that it was pointed inward, at the men with retinues, and it was pointed at paper.

Who may speak

The first rule of the system is a monopoly on the channel to the apex, and Bowdich states it in a parenthesis he clearly thought was a minor procedural note. Describing the mission's first public audience, he records that the Englishmen's linguist addressed the King's linguists — *(who are alone allowed to speak to him in public).*

Alone allowed. Not merely that etiquette preferred it, or that petitioners customarily used an intermediary: no one in the Asante empire, of any rank, spoke directly to the Asantehene in public. The *akyeame* — rendered by the English as linguists, and better understood as spokesmen, counsellors and procedural officers —

stood between the sovereign and every word addressed to him and every word he uttered. There were four of them at the top of the hierarchy, they carried staffs of office, and they were the King's men.

Consider what that arrangement does. Every message reaching the apex has been shaped by an officer of the apex before it arrives. Every message leaving it has been rendered by the same officers, who can soften, sharpen, delay or lose it. A chief who wishes to complain must complain through the establishment he is complaining about. And because the speech is public and mediated, there is no such thing as a private word with the king in front of the court: the exchange is a performance with a fixed cast, and nothing unrehearsed passes through it.

The cadre was bound to itself by oath. *All the King's linguists take fetish to be true to each other, and to report faithfully*, Bowdich records — a licensed information corps, sworn as a body, in a society where the graduated ladder of oaths carried real force. That oath is doing two things at once. It secures the fidelity of the report upward, which the King needs. And it makes the corps a closed group with obligations to one another, which means that suborning one of them requires suborning the collective.

Around them stood the rest of the state's communications establishment: the heralds and the *ahenkwaa*, the drummers whose *atumpan* reproduced the tones of Twi and therefore spoke rather than signalled, and the horn-blowers. And the horns illustrate the licensing principle exactly, because a horn call was a possession. Every senior captain had a flourish rendering a sentence, known to the whole population — Bowdich found that any Asante in the street would repeat a chief's phrase on request — and the King's own horns declared *I pass all Kings in the world.* To have a horn phrase at all was to hold rank. The right to broadcast was distributed by the state, in fixed quantities, to named men, and everybody could hear who was speaking.

The channels, and who garrisoned them

The second instrument is geographic, and it is the one this case adds to the collection.

From the eighteenth century Kumasi was the hub of eight Great Roads — *nkwantempon* — running out to the frontiers: four north to Bondoukou, Daboya, Yendi and the routes beyond that met the trans-Saharan traffic, four south to the coastal ports between the Volta and the Komoé. The central government maintained the major roads and the districts the branches. Osei Bonsu had them overhauled in 1816, straightened, cleared of roots and cut to a standard width of thirty to forty feet — work completed the year Bowdich walked up one of them. There was an officer of state responsible for them, the *akwanmofohene*, who paid the clearing gangs and levied

fines for nuisances on the highway. And there was a highway police, the *nkwansrafo*, garrisoning control points on the routes near the frontiers, monitoring what moved and collecting the customs.

Now put that beside the physical facts established at the beginning of this study. This is closed forest. Off a path, a man is invisible at twenty yards; there is no elevation to watch from, no open ground to cross, no dust to see. Visibility in such a country is not a natural condition that a state can exploit. **It is a thing that has to be built.**

So the road system is not only infrastructure. Cutting eight corridors through an opaque medium and then garrisoning them at the frontier converts a country in which nothing can be seen into a country in which everything that matters can be seen, provided it is travelling. Trade must use the roads, because a caravan of headloaded goods cannot move through undisturbed forest. Armies must use them. Messengers must use them. Tribute must come down them. And at the far end of each, a post that counts what passes and takes a duty on it.

The limits of that arrangement are as instructive as its reach. The Asante state could see everything on eight lines and almost nothing in the spaces between them, which is precisely consistent with what the earlier modules found — a floor that could annihilate an army in the field and could not stand over a village, an extraction that reached provinces and not households, an enforcement apparatus that had to be borrowed from families because the state had none of its own at close range. This was a polity with excellent long-range vision along fixed axes and no peripheral vision at all. It knew what was coming down the road from Salaga. It did not know what was being said in a village four miles into the bush, and it made no serious attempt to find out.

The books

Which brings us to what the apparatus was actually most exercised about, and it is the thing the reader would least expect an oral state to care about.

In 1817 the Asantehene dictated a letter to the Governor of Cape Coast, and Bowdich preserved his words. The subject was the aftermath of the Fante war, and the King set out his terms. He had beaten the coastal states; they had asked for peace; and this is what he demanded of them:

Then the King said, what caboceer lives at Cape Coast and Annamaboe, what books they get from the forts, let them send all, and then we can be friends. And the King sent word too, if my messengers go to Cape Coast fort, and if they bring pots of gold, and casks of goods, then I can't take that, but I must have the books.

Pots of gold and casks of goods, refused. *I must have the books.*

The books are the notes: the written instruments by which European forts acknowledged the ground-rents and monthly stipends owed to the African authorities on whose land they sat. They were the documentary form of a standing relationship — a title to income, and to the recognition that came with it. And a sovereign who could not read had identified, precisely, that the paper was the thing worth having and the treasure was not.

He had form. Elsewhere in the same dictated statement: *The Danish fort gave a book to another Akim caboceer, Arrawa Akim; the King killed all and took their books.* An Akyem chief accepted a written instrument from a European fort. The Asantehene executed the parties and confiscated the documents.

Read those two passages together and the information regime's central preoccupation is fully visible. What a written note in the hands of a subordinate ruler creates is a **durable, transferable, verifiable relationship with an outside power that does not pass through the centre.** It survives the death of the men who made it. It can be shown to a third party. It can be produced years later as proof. It is, in short, everything an oral relationship is not, and everything the *akyeame* monopoly was designed to prevent — a channel the centre neither mediates nor witnesses.

This is worth stating as a general result, because it corrects an assumption the collection has been carrying. **Illiteracy at the apex does not produce naïveté about text; it produces a monopoly policy toward text.** An unlettered sovereign in a lettered world does not fail to understand documents. He understands that a document is a relationship he cannot supervise, and he responds by requiring that all such documents be surrendered to him and by killing subordinates who acquire them. Asante's rulers were not baffled by paper. They were correct about it, and hostile to it in exactly the places where it threatened them.

The corollary appears in the same letter, and it is the note of a man who has grasped the mechanism and resents being on the wrong side of it: the English, he complains, now offer only four ackies for the great fort at Cape Coast and the same for Anomabo, and *that is what makes the King's heart break out when he looks on the book and thinks of four ackies.* He looks on the book. He cannot read it. He knows exactly what it is.

Sleeping palavers, and witnesses in the bush

The third instrument is the management of what an accused person is allowed to know, and here the record is unusually specific because Bowdich watched a case run.

The Asante procedure withheld the case from the defendant until he had committed himself. *The accuser is never discovered or confronted to the accused, nor the evidence revealed, until the latter has fully replied to the charge, as outlined by the King's*

linguists. The charge is summarised by the King's own spokesmen; the defendant answers it; only then does he learn who has accused him and what the evidence is.

Cases were also deliberately aged. Ordinary suits were *frequently allowed to sleep even for years... to make the damages sued for, the heavier* — a matter of arithmetic, since a stolen hen would be charged with the value of the broods it would have produced. But political cases were slept for a different reason, and Bowdich names it: *State palavers are also allowed to sleep for years, but that is to impose the confidence on the accused that the principal witnesses are dead, and the impression is artfully assisted by the policy of the council.*

To impose the confidence. The delay is not administrative slowness; it is an operation designed to induce a false belief in the target, and the council actively cultivates the belief. And he gives the instance: *The witnesses against Appia Nanu, who had reported his haughty message to the King, had not been seen for nearly twelve months before they burst before him on the day of his trial, having been sent into the bush on the most distant frontier.*

Witnesses concealed for a year on a remote frontier, a defendant allowed to believe they were dead, and a coordinated production at trial. That is a counter-intelligence operation, described in a sentence, in 1819. And it tells you what the state's information apparatus was for, because Appia Nanu was not a peasant. He was a great man, whose offence was a message, and whose disgrace — as the revenue accounts show — was followed by the seizure of three jars of gold dust.

Layered over all of it was the annual assize inside the national festival. Every chief and the majority of tributaries were required at Kumasi for the Odwira, and *If a chief or caboceer has offended, or if his fidelity be suspected, he is seldom accused or punished until the Yam Custom, which they attend frequently unconscious, and always uncertain of what may be laid to their charge.* Compulsory attendance, at a fixed date, by men who cannot know whether they are coming to a festival or to their own trial. Uncertainty administered as a policy, once a year, to the entire political class.

What was actually being hidden

Which lets the module answer the question it has been circling. Where is the seam here — the gap between what the order says and what it does, whose management is the order's standing task?

The colonial cases in this collection have an easy answer, because distance supplies it: the seam runs between the metropole's public account and the colony's lived reality, and the whole apparatus exists to keep the two ends from meeting. Asante has no

metropole and no distant public whose good opinion funds the enterprise. On the face of it there is no seam at all.

But look at where the machinery is pointed and the seam becomes visible, running in a direction the framework has not been scoring. Every instrument catalogued above is aimed at the same people, and they are not the ruled.

Only the linguists may speak to the King — a rule that constrains chiefs, not farmers, since a farmer was never going to address the sovereign anyway. The books must be surrendered — a rule about subordinate *rulers* holding independent relations with outside powers. The highway police garrison the frontiers and count the trade — which watches merchants and provincial authorities, not villagers. Palavers are slept and witnesses hidden — used against great men whose offence is a message. The assize is folded into the festival every chief must attend. The tribute is deliberately indefinite, so that no province can establish what it owes. And the treasury is kept in one man's memory, with the Muslim secretary confined to recording *the greater political events* and nothing financial, so that nobody — including the chiefs whose contributions filled it — can audit what the state has.

The seam in this order runs between the apex and its own coordinating class. What is being concealed is not the treatment of the poor from the eyes of the powerful; it is the state's finances, its intentions, its evidence and its timing from the eyes of the men who commanded its army. That is the correct target, because those were the only people who could do anything. The commoner was handled by formation and by his own lineage's liability for him, and required no information management at all. The chief of Dwaben commanded a wing.

And the two most famous suppressions in Asante's history fit the pattern exactly. The founding law made it a capital offence to say where a man's people had been conquered from — which erases the internal boundary that a disaffected coalition could otherwise organise along. And when the founder was killed in the field, the army's answer to every inquiry was *Mekoroe na mante*, I joined the campaign but never heard of it, until the concealment hardened into the most binding oath in the language. Neither of those was hiding anything from peasants. Both were preventing a fracture among men with troops.

The one document in the room

There is a scene in Bowdich that deserves to stand as this module's image, because it shows an oral polity handling a written object with complete and slightly unnerving competence.

The Asantehene decided to dictate a letter to the King of England. His linguists spoke it; the Englishmen wrote it down. And Bowdich records the procedure. When the linguist paused, the King *by his desire requested us to repeat all the King had said* — a read-back, to verify that the writing matched the speech. He was *much pleased with our accuracy.* Then, the session over, *He locked up what had been written, and heard it read again the next day, before his linguists continued.* An earlier letter to the Governor he simply *would not trust out of his hands*, and when it was finished he made his mark and insisted on repeating it in the direction.

A man who cannot read has produced a document, verified it by having it read aloud in his presence, secured it under lock, had it re-verified the following day before allowing the work to resume, and refused to let it out of his possession in the interval. Every safeguard a literate archivist would apply, arrived at from first principles by someone who could not check a single word himself.

And it points at the arrangement's real limit. The state's only continuous written record was kept by a Muslim secretary in Arabic, and it was confined to *the greater political events* — no accounts, no tribute rolls, no registers. The one archive Asante possessed was in a script the sovereign could not read, in the hands of a man from a community outside the clan system, who therefore had no standing to use it against anybody. That is not a failure of administration. Read alongside the confiscation of the coastal notes, it looks like a settled policy: writing is dangerous, so the state will keep the minimum it needs and will keep it where it cannot become a weapon.

Reading the information regime against the framework

The framework holds that an order's information apparatus exists to manage the seam between its account of itself and what it actually does, and that the apparatus can be read backwards to find the seam. That method works here, but it returns an answer in an unexpected direction, and the correction is this module's contribution.

In an order with no external audience, the seam runs inward, and the censorship is pointed at the coordinating class rather than at the ruled. Every instrument in the Asante system — the monopoly of the *akyeame*, the confiscation of written notes, the slept palaver and the concealed witness, the annual assize disguised as a festival, the deliberately indefinite tribute, the unwritten treasury — restricts what chiefs, provincial rulers and great men are able to know. Almost none of it restricts what a farmer knows, because a farmer's knowledge was not a risk. The general rule the collection should carry is that **the direction the censorship points identifies the party the apex actually fears**, and it is not always the party being crushed. Where a study finds an elaborate information regime and no obvious external public to deceive,

it should look upward and inward before concluding that the apparatus is aimed at the poor.

Two further results attach, and both compound with what the earlier modules established.

The first concerns the medium, and it completes the finding about formation. An oral order is exceptionally resistant to leakage, because the failure mode of censorship — the document that escapes — requires documents. But that same order will treat *incoming* text as a mortal threat, and correctly. A note held by a subordinate is a relationship the centre cannot mediate, cannot witness, and cannot terminate by killing the parties, because the paper outlives them. Hence *I must have the books*, and hence the execution of chiefs who accepted them. **The rule is that an oral apex is not innocent about writing but monopolistic toward it**, and the sharpest test of any such order's information policy is what it does when a document enters from outside.

The second concerns geography, and it may be the most transferable thing in the module. Where the terrain is opaque, **surveillance is an act of construction rather than of observation**: a state cannot watch a forest, so it cuts eight roads through the forest and watches those. That produces a very particular epistemic shape — long sight along fixed axes, blindness everywhere else — and it explains a great deal about this order that would otherwise look like inconsistency. Asante knew the volume of the kola trade at Salaga and did not know what was happening in a village four miles off the road; it could summon every chief in the empire to a fixed point on a fixed date and could not tell you who lived in the bush behind them. Infrastructure and surveillance were the same investment, and the state's field of vision is legible on a map of its roads. When those roads were abandoned after the conquest, what was lost was not only transport.

Finally, a corollary that the ending of this study will have to test. An order whose archive is performed rather than written, whose treasury is one man's memory, and whose only continuous record is a short list of political events in a foreign script kept by an outsider, has an information system of extraordinary internal security and almost no redundancy. It cannot be leaked. It also cannot be reconstructed. **Whatever cannot be copied cannot be stolen, and cannot be recovered either** — which is a reasonable trade while the officeholders live, and a catastrophic one at the moment somebody removes them.

A note on sources. The exact quotations are from T. E. Bowdich, *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee* (London, 1819), digitised text: the King's linguists as those alone allowed to speak to him in public; the linguists' mutual oath to be true to each other and to report faithfully; the horn flourishes and the King's own; the withholding

of accuser and evidence until the accused has fully replied; the sleeping of ordinary palavers to inflate damages and of state palavers to impose the confidence that the witnesses are dead, with the Appia Nanu case and the witnesses sent to the most distant frontier for nearly twelve months; the deferral of accusations against suspected chiefs to the Yam Custom, which they attend uncertain of the charge; the Moorish secretary recording only the greater political events; the read-back, the locking up and the re-reading of the dictated letter, and the King's refusal to let the earlier letter out of his hands. The passages beginning *what books they get from the forts* and *I must have the books*, and the account of the Danish fort's book given to an Akyem caboceer followed by the killing of the parties and the seizure of the documents, are from the letter the Asantehene dictated through his linguists and which Bowdich states he preserved verbatim. That claim of verbatim preservation is the weakest link on this page and should be weighed: the words passed from the King to his linguists, from the linguists into English through the mission's interpreter, and thence onto paper by men who did not speak Twi, and Bowdich published them in a volume arguing for a British residency at Kumasi. What survives is a faithful record of the sense as the mission understood it, not a transcript. The demand for the books is nonetheless corroborated by the general course of Anglo-Asante relations over the following decades, in which the notes and their transfer were repeatedly the substance of the quarrel.

Modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited. The eight Great Roads, their maintenance by the central government and the districts, the office of the *akwanmofohene* and his fine revenue, and the *nkwansrafo* highway police garrisoning control points near the frontiers and taking customs, follow Ivor Wilks's reconstruction of the Asante road system and the literature deriving from it; the 1816 overhaul, the standard width and the recorded travel times are from the same literature and from the accounts of Huydecoper and Hutton at second hand. The characterisation of the *akyeame* as spokesmen and procedural officers rather than mere interpreters follows the standard Akan political ethnography. The identification of the "books" with the notes recording ground-rents and stipends owed by the European forts follows the literature on the Elmina note and its analogues, which as noted earlier in this study is itself contested as to dates and amounts.

The standing limitation of the study bears on this module in a peculiar way. Almost every fact above concerns the suppression of information, and almost every one of them reaches us because a foreigner was permitted to watch and to write. What the apparatus successfully concealed is, by construction, not in the record; the operations we can see are the ones the state did not think worth hiding from an Englishman who

would be gone in five months. There is no way to estimate what is missing, and the reader should assume it is a great deal.

MODULE 8

Four Captains Controuling the King

The default — why men who did not like each other held the arrangement up for two centuries, what the apex did to escape them, and how that escape silently forked the constitution in two

What has to be explained

The ordinary subject has been priced already. He complied because he had land for nothing, because membership meant he could not be taken, because his own lineage was liable for him and therefore watched him, and because walking away led nowhere. None of that explains the arrangement's survival, because none of it is where the danger was.

The danger was inside the hierarchy, and it was installed on the first day. The Asante union was assembled by giving the chief of each constituent state command of a wing of the army. Nobody was disarmed. Every one of the men who mattered kept his own stool, his own lands, his own subjects and his own armed following, and the founding transaction purchased their service rather than their submission. At any point in two hundred years, the paramount of Dwaben or Mampon or Bekwai could have declined to march, and what stood in the way of his declining was not force, because the force was substantially his.

The question of this module is therefore why he marched. Not why he believed — that has been dealt with, and belief will not carry a man who is being made poorer. Why it was in his own interest to hold up an arrangement in which another man sat above him, and why the same was true of every officeholder down the chain, so that the whole thing was defended by each part defending itself. And then the harder half: where that stopped being true, for whom, and what happened when it did.

The union was a lineage

Start with the fact that is easiest to miss because it is not political.

The core states of the Asante union were not allies. They were relatives. Kumasi, Dwaben, Bekwai, Kokofu and Nsuta were Oyoko stools — the Asantehene's own matriclan — and the men who sat on them were his kinsmen in the strict Akan sense, sharing the blood that determined inheritance and eligibility. Around that core sat states of allied clans: Mampon and Kumawu of the Bretuo, Asumegya of the Asona, and others. The standard lists vary at the edges and should be handled with care, but

the shape is not in dispute. The inner ring of the Asante union was one extended matrilineage distributed across several capitals.

That single fact does more work than any constitutional provision. Coordination among kinsmen who dislike each other is the most durable kind available, because the asset they hold in common — the standing of the lineage — cannot be divided, cannot be sold, and cannot be taken away by exit. A Dwaben chief who broke with Kumasi did not merely leave a coalition; he attacked the collective standing of the family he belonged to, in a society where a person's whole position was a function of his *abusua*. The disagreement stayed inside the family, which is exactly where a disagreement is most bitter and least likely to become a divorce.

And the test case is available, which is why the point can be asserted rather than assumed. In the nineteenth century the Dwaben stool passed to Asafo Agyei, a man of the Asona clan who had come to it through marriage into the Dwaben royal house. The tradition records the reaction precisely: opposition and consternation among the fellow Oyoko of Kumasi, Nsuta and Kokofu. And Dwaben, alone among the founding states, became the one that withheld its forces in 1873–4, fought Kumasi, and walked out of the union altogether. The mechanism that had bound the core was descent; when descent lapsed at one of the great stools, the binding lapsed with it.

Rank was a place in a battle order

The second mechanism is the one the founding installed as a defect and which turns out, on inspection, to have been the arrangement's principal support.

Giving each *amanhene* command of a wing left him holding armed men, which is the classic exposure. But it also did something else: it made his standing in the state identical with his position in an order of battle that only existed when the state went to war. There is no Mampon right wing without an Asante centre. The *nifa* and the *benkum* and the *adonten* and the *kyidom* are not properties of the states that supply them; they are slots in a single formation, and a chief's dignity, his precedence, his title and the deference he received at home all followed from which slot he held.

So the retinue that made him dangerous was the same retinue whose value was entirely a function of the arrangement continuing. Withdrawn from the formation, it was a body of men with muskets and no standing — enough to fight a war and not enough to be anybody. This is the cleanest form the default takes anywhere in this collection: **the asset that gives a man the power to defect is an asset that only has value while he does not.**

The same logic ran down the chain. Beneath the wing commanders stood the *nsafohene*, the military officeholders of Kumasi, whose positions were commands.

Beneath them, captains whose rank was a number of men. Every rung of the hierarchy was denominated in a unit of the army, which meant that every man on it had a personal stake in there continuing to be an army, and therefore in there continuing to be a state that could raise one.

The annual re-performance

The third mechanism is that rank was made visible, and made visible on a schedule.

Standing in Asante was legible in objects — the umbrella a chief might carry, the swords borne before him, the horn phrase his blower was entitled to sound, the ornaments he was permitted to wear, and in the case of the three stools that had shared in the destruction of Denkyira, the right to copy the dead king's regalia. All of it was conferred or confirmed by the centre. No subject could sit in public with a cushion on his stool unless it had been presented to him by the King or by one of the four great captains. And Bowdich records the state going to considerable expense to keep the display fresh: *The royal gold ornaments are melted down every Yam Custom, and fashioned into new patterns, as novel as possible. This is a piece of state policy very imposing on the populace, and the tributary chiefs who pay but an annual visit.*

Once a year the whole hierarchy assembled at Kumasi and the ranking was performed in public, in order, in front of every other member of it. Attendance was compulsory and none was excused but the two most distant Muslim tributaries. So a chief's position was not a private understanding he could carry away with him; it was a thing enacted annually in a procession, and it existed only in that procession. A man who seceded did not merely forfeit a share of tribute. He removed himself from the only ranking there was, and no rank he could construct at home would be visible to anyone who mattered.

The dividend

The fourth mechanism is material and it is the one with a shelf life.

An expanding conquest state is a distribution machine. Every campaign produced captives, gold, regalia, tribute rights and offices, and the shares were real: the Adontehene took a tenth of the Dagomba render; the men sent to collect tribute kept two peredwans in every ten; commanders distributed booty; and the elevation of a poor man to a stool was routinely financed by sending him out to collect, so that the commission would establish him. Bowdich watched the King pay the enstoolment fees of two men raised for courage and then dispatch them to the provinces precisely so that they could recoup.

So long as the empire grew, every man in the hierarchy held a claim on the growth, and the arrangement paid a dividend to people who had done nothing that year but remain inside it. That is the most powerful loyalty instrument available to any order, and it is also the most fragile, because it must keep paying.

Bowdich preserves what happened when it did not, in a story about a neighbouring king that reads as a warning to everybody in the system. The King of Akyem, wanting to make war, was obliged to obtain the Asante government's permission, which he bought with the promise of half the spoil. The war *gained little or nothing*, and he did not pay. He then heard that the Asantehene intended to demand his head, *and knowing that King's word was irrevocable, he summoned his ministers, and desired to sacrifice his life for the quiet of his people: his ministers insisted on sharing his fate; and a barrel of powder being brought for each to sit on, they drank a large quantity of rum, and blew themselves up with the fire from their pipes.*

A ruler who could not deliver a promised share, and the entire ministry that had served him, sitting on powder kegs. The distribution machine did not tolerate a missed payment, and everyone in the hierarchy knew it.

Every man's own hill

The fifth mechanism is the subtlest and it is the one that reaches furthest down.

The arrangement did not merely reward the men at the top. It secured each officeholder's dominance over the people immediately below him, which is the cheapest loyalty an order can buy because it costs the centre nothing and is felt daily.

Capital punishment was reserved to the Asantehene. Read from the top that is a constraint on every chief; read from the chief's own position it is a guarantee that no rival within his state can lawfully kill him, and that the ultimate sanction in any local quarrel belongs to a distant authority rather than to his nearest enemy. Collective liability for debt made every lineage head the effective master of his own people, because their obligations were enforceable against him and his against them. The founding law forbidding anyone to disclose another's origins protected every man who had risen from being reminded where he had come from — which is to say it protected precisely the created officers whose loyalty the centre most needed. And the appeal to Kumasi that let a tributary's subject go over his own ruler's head cut both ways: it constrained the ruler, and it also relieved him of the most dangerous cases.

The result is an order in which a very large number of men, at very different levels, each held a position that was individually worth defending and whose defence required the arrangement to persist. Nobody had to love Kumasi. Each had to prefer his own hill, and his own hill was cut out of the same rock.

The apex inside the arrangement

Which brings us to the finding that a study of this order cannot avoid and which the framework's usual framing tends to obscure. The Asantehene was not above the default. He was inside it, and it constrained him.

Bowdich, distributing presents in 1817, listed the recipients in order of who mattered and named the group without ceremony: *the aristocracy, or four captains controuling the King, his four linguists, his brother and successor.* Controlling. Not advising, not restraining in extremity — controlling, in the ordinary flow of business, and Bowdich elsewhere notes that the interference of those four in any matter *is irresistible with the King.*

And the apex could be removed. The procedure is documented, and it is worth setting out in full because it shows the default operating at the moment of maximum stress.

Asantehene Osei Kwame, in the last years of the eighteenth century, had absented himself from the capital. The first move was constitutional and public: *it was formally announced to him, that if he was not present at the approaching Yam custom, he would be deprived of the stool.* The instrument that bound every chief in the empire — compulsory attendance at the national festival — bound the sovereign too, and non-attendance was the ground of forfeiture.

He did not come, and Bowdich, who was clearly told the sequence by people who had watched it, introduces what followed with an understatement: *The form of the dethronement is interesting.* Appia Danqua, whose power he compares to that of a mayor of the palace, *repaired to the King's mother with the chief captains, and deliberately recounting the offences of her son, commanded her to remonstrate with him, as the daughter of their old king, and the parent to whom he owed his elevation.* The mother — *who no doubt had assisted in the private council*, Bowdich adds — performed reluctance, said her remonstrances had already been despised and that the king had attempted her life, *and begged them to raise her second son, Sai Apokoo, to the stool the elder had forfeited. This was complied with.* The deposed king was sent a few of his women and slaves and told to go into the bush and build himself a village.

Every element of that procedure is the default in operation. The captains do not simply take the stool from him; they route the removal through the royal matrilineage, so that it takes the form of a request from the family. The queen mother, who has already agreed in private, is required to ask in public. The office is untouched; only the occupant changes; nobody at any point proposes that there should not be an Asantehene. And the men executing the removal are defending their own positions by

doing it, because a king who will not appear at the Odwira is a king who has stopped performing the ceremony in which their own ranks are enacted.

The framework's usual reading is that a default holds an arrangement up against pressure from below and from outside. Here it also holds the arrangement up against the apex. **A default sufficiently well constructed will remove a sovereign who threatens it and will do so in a form that leaves the sovereignty stronger than before.** The greatest custom ever known was made for Osei Kwame after he died.

Retrenched and conciliated

No apex enjoys being controlled by four captains, and the Asantehenes worked at the problem for a century. The counter-move is the standard one — build a class of officers who owe everything to the centre and nothing to any lineage — and Asante executed it with unusual thoroughness.

Bowdich describes the decisive intervention in a single sentence whose every clause is doing work. Of the king he calls Sai Cudjo — Osei Kwadwo, whose reign the standard chronology places from 1764, where Bowdich's garbled dating gives 1753 — he writes: *The Aristocracy was retrenched and conciliated by this monarch, who raised his favourite captains to the vacant stools, uniting three or four in one, and swearing that their lives should be equally sacred, to anticipate any doubts of his fidelity to the constitution.*

Retrenched and conciliated. He waited for stools to fall vacant; he consolidated three or four of them into one, reducing the number of independent positions in the hierarchy; he filled the amalgamated stools with his own men; and he extended to those men the ancient privilege of the founding aristocracy — exemption from capital punishment — so that nobody could say the constitution had been altered. Bowdich even records the motive as it was explained to him: *to anticipate any doubts of his fidelity to the constitution.* The forms were preserved with great care precisely because the substance was being changed.

Around this ran the rest of the apparatus. New posts of central government were created as service stools and made to descend from father to son, in flat contradiction of the matrilineal rule, which prised them out of the clan system and attached them to the office instead. Offices were filled by achievement, including by men of foreign and servile origin, whose rise the founding law protected by making their antecedents unmentionable. Whether all this amounts to a bureaucratic revolution, as Ivor Wilks argued, or to an elaboration of patrimonial household administration, as Kwame Arhin, Larry Yarak and T. C. McCaskie have variously contended, is an argument in the scholarship that this study does not need to settle. What is not in dispute is the

direction: successive Asantehenes built, at Kumasi, a body of officeholders whose positions came from the centre and could be taken back by it.

It worked. Asante's central capacity in the century after Osei Kwadwo was without parallel among its neighbours: eight great roads with a highway police, a resident chief responsible for each province, a treasury, an annual assize. The apex acquired an instrument that was not the *amanhene*'s to withhold.

The fork nobody could see

And here is the module's principal finding, which took the whole reconstruction to reach.

Building a counter-elite does not weaken the default. It **duplicates** it. The Asantehene now had two bodies of men, each of which defended the arrangement by defending its own position — the *nsafohene* and appointed officers of Kumasi, whose standing came from the centre, and the *amanhene* of the constituent states, whose standing came from the founding compact. Two defaults are more stability than one, and for a hundred years that is exactly what they delivered.

But the two groups were not defending the same arrangement, and neither of them knew it, because both described their loyalty in the same words.

For the Kumasi officeholder, the arrangement was the supremacy of the centre: a strong Asantehene, an effective administration, offices filled on merit, provinces governed. For the paramount of a founding state, the arrangement was the compact of 1701: constituent states with their own stools, a sovereign chosen by and answerable to those who had made the union, and the wings of the army in the hands of the men who had always held them. Both were loyalists. Both would have told you, sincerely, that they were defending the Asante nation. They meant incompatible things.

The disagreement was invisible for as long as the apex was strong enough to pay both — the officers with office and the paramounts with dividends and precedence. It became visible the moment he could not. In 1874 Wolseley burned Kumasi and the Treaty of Fomena stripped the southern allegiances; the dividend stopped. And within a decade the latent constitutional dispute was the war.

The record of it is unusually explicit. When Kofi Kakari was deposed in September 1874, the *amanhene* held the deposition unconstitutional on the ground that it had been done without their approval. After Mensa Bonsu's overthrow in 1883, the *nsafohene* moved to enstool a successor, and the *amanhene* resisted on the ground that selecting an Asantehene was their role and the officers were usurping it. The civil war that followed, from 1883 to Prempe's victory in 1888, was among other things a straight confrontation between the Kumasi military officeholders and the paramount

chiefs for control of the state. It was murderous and it lasted five years, and both sides were composed of men defending positions they held under the same constitution.

That is the general result this case contributes. An apex that builds a counter-elite to escape the constraint of an existing one does not create a rival; he creates a second constituency with an equal and opposite theory of what the arrangement is. While he can fund both, the duplication is pure gain and looks like unusual solidity. When he cannot, the order does not face a revolt against the arrangement — it faces two factions who are each certain they are the ones upholding it, which is far harder to settle than a rebellion, because there is no disloyal party to punish and no compromise that is not a constitutional surrender to one side. **Look for the fork at the moment it is created, not at the moment it opens.** Osei Kwadwo's careful swearing that his new men's lives should be as sacred as the old aristocracy's — the very gesture by which he denied that he was changing anything — is where it began.

Dwaben, and the price of a ceremonial stake

The second finding concerns which member of the hierarchy actually left, and it is not the one the arrangement's design would predict.

Dwaben held the largest formal privilege in the union. Its chief had commanded the van at Feyiase; the gold bracelet taken from Ntim Gyakari's wrist had gone to him; and from that trophy came the Dwabenhene's perpetual prerogative of placing a new Asantehene on the stool by touching the bracelet three times to his wrist. Of all the constituent rulers, Dwaben had the greatest ceremonial stake in there continuing to be an Asantehene at all.

Dwaben seceded twice. It fought Kumasi around 1831 and its people migrated to Akyem, returning under assurances from a new Asantehene. It withheld its forces during the war of 1873–4, fought Kumasi again in 1875, was defeated, and this time left for good, its people settling under British protection at Koforidua as New Dwaben, joined by towns from around the old state.

The reasons were particular — a stool that had passed out of the Oyoko, a chief with a long grievance, an accessible British protectorate at the far end of the road. But the structural point is general and worth stating plainly. **A ceremonial privilege is not a stake in the arrangement; it is a stake in the arrangement's forms, and the forms are the part that goes on being available when the substance stops.** Dwaben's bracelet cost Kumasi nothing to grant, was worth a great deal to Dwaben's pride, and bought precisely nothing at the moment when what Dwaben wanted was a share of a shrinking revenue and a say in who sat on the stool. Where a study finds an apex paying a great magnate in honours rather than income, it should mark that magnate as a likely

defector rather than a secured one: honours are cheap because they are cheap, and the recipient can generally work out what he has been given.

Any king of Asante, good or bad

The terminal condition of a default is not rebellion. It is the moment when a man with standing and means concludes that the arrangement is not worth defending regardless of who is running it — because at that point there is no reform available, no better occupant, nothing to negotiate.

Asante reached it, and a founding state said so out loud. In 1883, exasperated by Kumasi's exactions, the Bekwaihene Osei Yaw declared that nothing would induce him to serve Mensa Bonsu — or, as the record has it, *any king of Asante*, whether he were a good or a bad ruler. Bekwai was Oyoko. Bekwai was one of the five core states. Its chief was not proposing a different king; he was declining the office.

What had happened to produce that is the ordinary arithmetic of a distribution machine that has stopped distributing. After 1874 the indemnity had to be found, the southern allegiances were gone, the tributary renders from the north had ceased, and Mensa Bonsu — chronically short of revenue and, on the standard account, personally rapacious — pushed exactions to levels the interior would not bear. Attempts were made to depose him in 1877 and in 1880. In early 1883 the commoners of the capital took control of the town and shut him in his palace; on 8 March a number of his senior functionaries entered the palace, took him into custody, declared him destooled and banished him.

The division of labour in that sentence is the thing to notice, and it bears directly on the question of who can and cannot move an order of this kind. Gareth Austin's reconstruction of the 1883 rising revises the older account of an organised commercial middle class and finds instead a broad movement of export-producing commoners, rich and poor together, against the centralising monarchy's new and punitive revenue measures — and, crucially, finds that they were not trying to abolish chieftaincy but to use chiefly authority to amplify their protest. The commoners seized the town. The officeholders performed the destoolment. The energy came from below; the instrument was, as it always is in this order, a group of men inside the hierarchy defending their own positions.

Reading the default against the framework

Four results, of which the second is the substantive addition.

The default here was unusually well made, and its strongest component was kinship. The Asante union's core was one matrilineage distributed across five capitals, which converts a coalition of armed equals into a family quarrel — bitter, permanent, and almost impossible to exit, because the asset held in common is a shared descent that no member can take away with him. Where the corpus finds a conquest coalition that holds for centuries without a purge, it should look first for a kinship structure underneath the political one, and it should mark the moment any constituent stool passes out of the shared descent group as a specific, datable weakening. Dwaben's passage to an Asona chief and Dwaben's secession are not two facts.

An apex that builds a counter-elite duplicates the default rather than escaping it, and the duplication conceals a constitutional fork. This is the finding to carry. Osei Kwadwo's amalgamated stools, his favourites installed on them, his service offices inherited patrilineally out of the clan system, and his careful oath that the new men's lives were as sacred as the old families' — all of it produced a second body of men who defended the arrangement out of self-interest, which looked like double the stability and was, while the money lasted. But the created officers were defending the supremacy of the centre and the hereditary paramounts were defending the compact of 1701, and both used the same word for it. **A default made of two constituencies with incompatible theories of the arrangement is more stable than one, right up to the moment the apex cannot pay, at which point it produces not a rebellion but a civil war between two sets of loyalists** — which is harder to end, because neither side can be punished as disloyal and no settlement is available that is not a constitutional defeat. The fork is created at the moment of the reform and opens at the moment of the shortfall, and the interval can be a century.

A ceremonial stake is not a stake. Dwaben held the union's grandest formal privilege and was the first great state to leave, twice. Honours are granted because they are cheap, and the men who receive them are generally able to price them correctly. In any hierarchy, the magnates paid in precedence rather than in revenue should be read as the least secured, not the most.

And the apex is inside the default, not above it. Four captains controlling the King; a sovereign warned that non-attendance at the Yam Custom would cost him the stool; a destoolment routed through the queen mother so that it took the form of a request from the family; the office untouched and the occupant changed; and the greatest funeral ever known made for the man they removed. A default of that quality does not merely resist pressure from below and outside. It disciplines the top, and it does so in a way that leaves the arrangement more solid afterwards than before. That is

what it means for an order to be defended by default: even its own sovereign, when he becomes a threat to it, is removed by a procedure that reaffirms it.

A note on sources. The exact quotations are from T. E. Bowdich, *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee* (London, 1819), digitised text: *the aristocracy, or four captains controuling the King, his four linguists, his brother and successor*; the irresistibility of those four with the King and the purchase of their interference; the rule that no subject may sit in public with a cushion on his stool unless presented by the King or one of the four; the annual melting and refashioning of the royal gold as a piece of state policy; the Akyem king who promised half the spoil, failed to pay, and blew himself up with his ministers on powder barrels; the account of Osei Kwadwo retrenching and conciliating the aristocracy by uniting three or four stools in one, raising his favourites to them, and swearing their lives equally sacred *to anticipate any doubts of his fidelity to the constitution*; and the whole of the deposition of Osei Kwame — the formal warning about the Yam Custom, Appia Danqua as mayor of the palace, the chief captains commanding the King's mother to remonstrate, her assistance in the private council, her request that her second son be raised, and the deposed king sent into the bush. Bowdich's warnings stand and one bites here: his chronology is unreliable, and he dates Osei Kwadwo's accession to 1753 where the standard reckoning gives 1764; his date is not adopted.

Modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited. The Oyoko composition of the core states and the Bretuo and Asona affiliations of others follow the standard Asante political ethnography, in which the lists vary at the margins; the reaction of the Oyoko stools to Asafo Agyei's accession at Dwaben, and the sequence of the Dwaben secessions of about 1831 and of 1875 ending in the settlement at Koforidua, are drawn from Asante and Dwaben traditional-historical accounts and from the standard reference literature, and the traditional material carries the usual warning that it was recorded within communities with a direct interest in the quarrel. The confrontation between *nsafohene* and *amanhene* after 1874, the *amanhene*'s objection that Kofi Kakari's deposition was unconstitutional because unapproved by them, their resistance to the officers' attempt to enstool a successor in 1883, and the character of the 1883–88 civil war as a contest between the two bodies for control of the state, follow the recent work on the military structures of the late Asante state; the Bekwaihene Osei Yaw's repudiation is quoted in that literature from A. Aidoo's study of the succession crisis and is paraphrased here from it rather than quoted at length. The revision of Wilks's account of the 1883 rising — that it was a broad movement of export-producing commoners rather than an organised middle class, and that they sought to use chiefly authority rather than to overthrow chieftaincy — is Gareth Austin's. The dispute over

whether Osei Kwadwo's reforms constituted a bureaucratic revolution, as Ivor Wilks held, or an elaboration of patrimonial administration, as Arhin, Yarak and McCaskie have argued, is named and not adjudicated.

The weakest evidence is the clan composition of the constituent states, where the traditional lists differ and where a modern reader is dependent on twentieth-century compilations; the argument above does not rest on any single attribution but on the general fact of a shared Oyoko core, which is not contested. The Adontehene's tenth of the Dagomba tribute is reported in secondary accounts of the northern conquests and I have not traced it to a primary source. The account of the 1883 destoolment combines the reference literature's narrative of the commoners seizing the town and the functionaries entering the palace with Austin's analysis of who was moving and why; the two are compatible but they are not a single source. And the standing limitation of the study applies with particular sharpness to a module about elite motive: what a paramount chief of Dwaben or Bekwai actually calculated survives nowhere in his own words, and every attribution of interest above is inferred from position and from conduct.

MODULE 9

One Meal, and One Meal Only

Plurality or foreclosure — an order with no charter, no rhetoric of liberty and a number of real protections; where each of them came from; and why the men who won them were never the men they protected

A clean test, because there is nothing to read

The usual difficulty in asking whether an order had liberties is that orders lie about it. There is a charter, a code, a declaration; it says handsome things; and the work of the module is to establish how much of it was ever true. The failure mode is always the same — a right that exists on parchment and nowhere else, maintained because the parchment is doing work for an audience that will never test it.

Asante removes that difficulty entirely. There was no charter. There was no code. There was no declaration of anything, and there was no vocabulary of liberty in the order's account of itself: nothing corresponding to a freeborn right, a privilege of the subject, a franchise, or a liberty of the people. The state's own self-description, so far as it can be recovered, was about stools, ancestors, oaths and the nation's soul, and none of it made any promise to anybody.

This produces an unusually clean test, and the methodological point is worth stating before the evidence, because it applies to every case in this collection that lacked writing. **In an unwritten order, every liberty that can be found is a liberty that was exercised**, because there is no other way for one to exist. A right nobody used leaves no trace when there is no document to leave it in. So whatever turns up here is behaviour, not rhetoric — and what turns up is more than one might expect.

A law, with a penalty attached

Begin with the single best piece of evidence, which is a statute we possess because two Englishmen happened to be standing in the square when it was made.

Bowdich, in Kumasi in 1817, wrote: *We were present at the promulgation of the following law*, and set down its terms.

All persons sent on the King's business shall no longer seize provisions in any country, whether tributary or otherwise, in his name; but requiring food, shall offer a fair price for the first they meet with, if this is refused, they shall then demand one meal, and one meal only, in the King's name, and proceed. This extends to all messengers sent by the head

captains, whose servants, as well as the King's, have been long in the habit of extorting goods from traders, and tobacco and provisions in the market place, in the names of their masters, which they shall do no longer without incurring the same penalty which is attached to the former part of this law, 110 penguins.

Read what that is. It is a restraint on the state's own agents, in favour of ordinary villagers and market traders, in every part of the empire, tributary or not. It abolishes requisition and replaces it with purchase. It preserves one narrow residual power — a single meal, demanded in the King's name, after a fair price has been offered and refused — and then requires the man to move on. It extends the same restraint to the servants of the four great captains, who are named in the law as habitual extortioners. And it attaches a specific penalty: a hundred and ten peredwans, which by Bowdich's own conversions is on the order of eleven hundred pounds currency, an enormous sum.

Bowdich himself saw why the last clause mattered and reached for a Greek lawgiver to say so: *This attachment of the penalty to the law (the chief merit of Zaleucus) manifests some advancement in polity, in securing the accused against arbitary judgment.* A rule with a stated penalty is a rule that cannot be enforced at whatever price the enforcer feels like. That is the difference between a protection and a permission to negotiate, and an English visitor of 1817 identified it correctly.

The form of enactment tells us who the law was for and who made it. *The linguists with their insignia advanced and announced it to each of the four members of the Aristocracy, then to the whole assembly; afterwards Cudjo Appani, the chief crier, proclaimed it to the people, who shouted their thanks; his fee from the King was ten ackies, from the people twenty.*

The four great captains are told first, individually, before the assembly. The people are told last, and they shout their thanks. And the crier is paid twice — ten ackies by the King who made the law and twenty by the people it protected. The beneficiaries tipped double. That is not a ceremonial detail; it is a measurement. People do not pay a herald two-to-one for news that means nothing to them.

Where that law came from

Now the question this module exists to ask. Who won it, and why?

Not the villagers. There is no petition, no delegation, no recorded agitation, and no mechanism by which any of those could have reached the Asantehene, since only his own linguists were permitted to address him in public. The law was made at the top and announced downwards.

Read the position instead. The men whose servants were doing the extorting were the King and the four great captains, and the law names them. Those servants were spending their masters' names — *extorting goods from traders, and tobacco and provisions in the market place, in the names of their masters* — which means each act of petty robbery was drawing on the credit of a great man who received none of the proceeds. And the victims were traders: the same traders on whom the state levied a duty at the point of sale and a customs charge on the road back from the coast, in a decade when the Atlantic slave market had just closed and gold, ivory and kola were what remained. A trader robbed on the road is a trader who does not come back, and a trade that is not made yields no duty.

So the law served two convergent interests at the top: the King's revenue base, and the great captains' control over their own retinues. It also served a third, quieter one — it made every one of those retinues answerable to a stated penalty rather than to the discretion of the master who had loosed them, which is the centre taking something from the magnates in the act of protecting the public.

That is the mechanism this module was built to find, and it is worth stating in its general form now that we have a clean instance. **The protection is real, the beneficiaries are genuine, and none of them were parties to the bargain.** The traders and villagers of Asante received a substantive limit on the state's power to take their food, because two factions at the top of the hierarchy each had a reason to want the other's servants restrained and neither wanted to lose the customs.

Protection from the apparatus: what else there was

The provisions law is the best-documented protection, not the only one. The others are recoverable from Bowdich's summary of Asante law and from the structure of the courts, and each repays being traced to its origin.

No chief could kill his own subject. Capital punishment was reserved to the Asantehene alone. Read from the centre that is a constraint on the *amanhene*; read from where an ordinary man stood, it is the removal of the ultimate sanction from the hands of the person most likely to want to use it on him — his own lord, in his own town, over a local quarrel. The subject of a provincial chief in Asante enjoyed a protection that the subject of an independent Akan state did not, and he enjoyed it because the Asantehene wanted his chiefs disarmed of the power of death.

A provincial subject could go over his ruler's head. A tributary's subject could appeal past his own courts to Kumasi and *claim decision by the law of Ashantee*. Again the origin is a fight between levels — the centre pulling jurisdiction upward at the

provinces' expense — and again the residue is a genuine right of appeal held by people who were not consulted about it.

The accuser was at risk. In treason cases *the life of the accuser is at risk as well as that of the accused*, forfeit on the accused's acquittal; and Bowdich reports that his best informants thought this indispensable because otherwise *envy, spleen, or covetousness would otherwise accumulate.* A man who brought a charge and failed had to feast the family and friends of the man he had failed to convict. That is a real deterrent to malicious prosecution, and the men who needed it most were not peasants — they were the great men who were the natural targets of denunciation, and who had built into the law the protection they wanted for themselves. It covered everybody.

The accused was heard. Charges were summarised by the King's linguists and the accused replied in full before the evidence was produced. That procedure was designed to trap him, and it did; but its other face is that no one was condemned without being made to answer, in public, in an assembly.

Anybody could force a hearing. The great oath was available to any litigant, and swearing it compelled adjudication. This is the only instrument in the entire order that a person of no standing could use to make the state attend to him, and its price was that a false swearing carried death — which is why, as Bowdich watched, at the top of the ladder *there is a gloomy silence; but this is seldom ventured.* A right rationed by its own severity is still a right, and the rationing is what made it credible.

Origins could not be spoken. The founding law making it a capital offence to say where a man's people had been conquered from is, from the beneficiary's side, a protection against a specific and devastating class of speech, enforced with the state's heaviest sanction. Nobody designed it as a liberty; it was the answer to a garrisoning problem. Its effect was that a man of foreign or servile descent could hold office and could not be reminded of it, and men of such descent did hold office.

Land was free and the market was open. A subject could clear any bush for a farm *without paying any thing to the King as lord of the soil*, and *the government has no power to direct the traders to any particular market* except where a war was on. Two universal, substantive economic freedoms, stated as rules of law by an outside observer with no reason to invent them.

Speech, petition, assembly

Now the three the framing asks about directly, and the answers are uneven.

Speech was foreclosed at the top and largely free at the bottom. Nobody of any rank addressed the Asantehene in public except his own linguists, which forecloses the single most valuable form of political speech there is. Certain utterances were capital:

swearing the great oath falsely, disclosing another's origins, and — by the evidence of the state's reaction to insults — speaking against the King's person. But the ordinary talk of ordinary people appears to have been unpoliced, for the reason established earlier: the state had eight roads and no capacity whatever to hear what was said off them. And once a year the ordinary rules were suspended entirely — during the Odwira, *neither theft, intrigue, or assault are punishable during the continuance, but the grossest liberty prevails.* Licensed inversion of that kind is a familiar instrument and it should not be mistaken for freedom; it is the state reminding everyone that the rules are its to suspend. But it is also, for the duration, a genuine and universally understood window.

Petition existed in two forms, both real and both expensive. A man could swear the oath and force a hearing. A provincial subject could appeal to Kumasi. There was no route by which a body of subjects could put a grievance to the apex as a body, and the absence is structural: the only assembly the order convened was of officeholders.

Assembly was the most foreclosed of the three, and the exception is instructive. The *Asantemanhyiamu*, the assembly of the union, was a body of chiefs; the councils at every level below it were bodies of elders and officeholders. There was no chamber, no seat and no procedure for anyone who did not hold a stool. What the young men of Kumasi — the *nkwankwaa*, free commoners without office — eventually did was to assemble anyway, without licence, in 1883, and take control of the capital. That worked, and it is the only time it worked, and what it produced is dealt with below.

The privilege that was let out and taken back

One liberty in this order can be traced across a century through three separate factional fights, and it is the clearest illustration in the collection of how an "in" is made, widened and levelled.

Created, 1701. The founding conferred one hereditary privilege: the direct descendants of Osei Tutu's peers were exempt from capital punishment. That is the mark of the "in" — a body of men who cannot be killed by the state, which in an order where the King held the sole power of death is the most valuable status available. Note its limit, in Bowdich's own words: they *are not subject to capital punishment, but can only be despoiled.* Their lives, not their property.

Widened, in the 1760s and 1770s. Osei Kwadwo, building his counter-elite, amalgamated vacant stools and installed his favourites on them — and, Bowdich records, swore *that their lives should be equally sacred, to anticipate any doubts of his fidelity to the constitution.* Here is the mechanism the framing predicts, exactly and explicitly. Men from below the old nobility were admitted to the nobility's single

constitutional privilege, and the admission served a factional fight: the King needed his new officers to be constitutionally indistinguishable from the founding families, so that nobody could accuse him of altering the settlement. The beneficiaries were let in because letting them in was the King's move against the men already inside.

Levelled, about 1799. On the accession of a young king, *the general assembly of the captains, jealous of the aristocracy, and desirous of making a favourable impression on the young King, insisted that the remaining members of it, should propitiate the reign, by publicly disclaiming their exemption from capital punishment.* The general body of officeholders, at the moment of maximum dynastic weakness, extracted a public surrender of the last hereditary immunity in the state — and framed it as a compliment to the incoming sovereign.

Three moves in a hundred years: a privilege created to mark the founding elite, extended by an apex to launder the creation of a new one, and destroyed by the wider body of captains as a levelling demand at a vulnerable accession. Nobody outside the hierarchy participated in any of it, and the net effect on an ordinary Asante was nil. But the pattern is the thing. **A liberty's history is the history of who needed it as a credential**, and the sequence of who holds it maps the sequence of who was fighting whom.

There is a loose end that should be flagged rather than tidied. Bowdich, in his statement of the law in 1817, still lists the exemption as operative with four holders. If it had been publicly renounced eighteen years earlier, either the renunciation was ceremonial, or the law outlived it, or he recorded two accounts from different informants and did not reconcile them. I cannot resolve it. What is not in doubt is that four men held it, and that Bowdich adds the detail that settles what it was worth by then: *all beggars.*

What made any of it more than words

Three things, and they are the answer to the question of what separates a real protection from a form.

A stated penalty. Bowdich's Zaleucus observation is correct and general. A rule enforced at the enforcer's discretion is a licence to bargain; a rule with a number attached — a hundred and ten peredwans — is a constraint on the enforcer as well as the offender.

A sanction that reached the apex. The Asantehene could be destooled, and was. Osei Kwame was warned that failure to attend the Yam Custom would cost him the stool and lost it around 1799. Kofi Kakari was deposed in September 1874. Mensa Bonsu was destooled and banished on 8 March 1883. Three sovereigns removed inside

a century, by procedure, with charges recounted and the royal matrilineage required to make the request — and the grounds recognised in the tradition include the arbitrary punishment of citizens. A constitutional limit that has actually been applied to the head of state three times is not rhetoric. It is the strongest evidence in this study that the order contained a genuine check, and it is worth noticing that the check reached furthest at the very top, where the framework usually finds the fewest constraints.

And use. The great oath was used, and its use was visibly costly. The provisions law was proclaimed and the people paid the crier double. The appeal to Kumasi was taken often enough that Bowdich could describe the practice. None of these is a document. All of them are behaviour.

What was foreclosed

Against that, the closures, stated without softening.

There was no representation of any kind for anyone who did not hold a stool. There was no route by which a body of subjects could address the sovereign. Political speech to the apex was monopolised by his own officers. And the protections that existed were **positional rather than general**: they attached to a status — subject of a tributary, accused person, holder of a founding descent, trader on a road — rather than to the fact of being a person under Asante authority. The only two that came close to universality were the right to clear land and the provisions law, and the second of those was eight months old when Bowdich wrote it down.

Below the line of membership there was nothing at all. The first-generation *odonko* had no standing to invoke any of it; his master could kill him without penalty. The *akyere* were held for killing. The peoples raided beyond Gonja and Dagomba were not parties to the order in any sense and had no protection from it whatsoever, in a system that reached them only through the men sent to catch them. Any account of Asante liberties that does not carry that sentence beside it is an account of the liberties of the included.

Residue, and where it went

Did the residue accrete? It did, and the shape of the accretion is the module's last finding.

Across the nineteenth century, and particularly after 1807, an ordinary Asante commoner's economic position thickened. Gareth Austin's reconstruction has overturned the older picture of near-total state dominance: there was a lively domestic trade, commoners could and did accumulate wealth through internal and external

commerce and through production for both markets, and ordinary people acquired slaves for their own households in substantial numbers. And commoners increasingly transacted as individuals — the phrase that gives Austin's essay its title comes from a case in which property changed hands with no elders present, that is, without the sanction of the lineage that in principle owned everything a person had.

That is residue accreting, and it accreted in the only medium available in an unwritten order: not in statute but in practice, in transactions that were done and not undone, until what had been irregular was normal. By the 1880s small producers and traders were, in Austin's phrase, a force to be reckoned with — and when Mensa Bonsu drove exactions to levels they would not bear, they moved. The commoners of Kumasi seized the capital and shut the king in his palace.

And then the crucial detail, which is why this module ends where it does. They did not build anything. Austin's finding is that the commoners sought not to overthrow chieftaincy but to use its authority to amplify their protests — and the destoolment itself was performed on 8 March by a number of the king's own senior functionaries, who entered the palace and took him into custody. The people supplied the weight; officeholders supplied the act.

Economic residue is a lever, not a chamber. It gave commoners the power to remove a king. It gave them no institution of their own, no standing seat, no procedure they could use next time without a crisis. Whether it would eventually have produced one is a question the record cannot answer, because within thirteen years of 1883 the order was under British occupation and within seventeen it was gone. That is a real historical loss and it should be named as one rather than resolved by assumption in either direction.

Reading liberty against the framework

Five results.

In an unwritten order there is no declaratory failure mode, and this makes such cases the corpus's best control on the whole question. Asante had no charter, no code, no rhetoric of liberty and no promise to anybody — and it had a statute limiting requisition by the state's own agents, with a stated penalty; a reservation of capital punishment that protected subjects from their lords; a right of appeal against a provincial ruler; a deterrent against malicious prosecution; an oath any person could swear to compel a hearing; free access to land; and three sovereigns removed by procedure inside a century. The corpus should therefore stop reading the presence of a charter as evidence about liberty in either direction. **The declaration and the thing are separable variables**, and this collection contains colonial orders full of declared

rights that did nothing sitting alongside an unlettered kingdom with undeclared rights that did something.

The clearest protections were by-products of vertical factional fights, and their beneficiaries were incidental to them. The reservation of capital punishment, the appeal to Kumasi and the prohibition on disclosing origins were all instruments in a contest between levels of the hierarchy; all three ended as protections for people at the bottom, none of whom were consulted. The general rule, and it is the most useful thing this module produces: **where an apex is fighting his own magnates, look for the subject's protections among the weapons.** The subject gets protected because protecting him is the form in which something is taken from the lord. And the converse should be tested against the other cases in the collection: where apex and magnates are aligned, expect few protections to appear, because none is required as a weapon.

The "in" is widened by an apex who needs to launder a new elite, and narrowed by the general body at a weak accession. The exemption from capital punishment was created in 1701 to mark the founding families, extended by Osei Kwadwo to his own appointees expressly *to anticipate any doubts of his fidelity to the constitution*, and surrendered under pressure from the assembly of captains around 1799 as a compliment to a young king. Where a study finds men from below the old nobility admitted to a nobility's privilege, the admission is the *cover* for something the apex is doing to the old nobility, and the privilege is likely to be attacked from within the hierarchy the moment the apex is weak.

What makes a liberty real is a stated penalty and a demonstrated reach to the top. Bowdich saw the first himself. The second is the destoolments: a constitutional limit applied three times to the head of state, on grounds that included governing arbitrarily. In this order the constraint was strongest at the apex and weakest at the base — the inverse of the usual expectation — because the men able to enforce constraints were the men whose own positions the apex threatened, and a farmer's position was not something the apex had any reason to threaten.

And residue accretes economically before it accretes politically, and may never make the second transition. Asante's commoners built a real private economy across the nineteenth century and converted it, in 1883, into enough weight to remove a king. They built no institution with it, and used the chiefs' authority to carry their protest. The lever was theirs; the chamber was not; and the order was destroyed before we can know whether the one would have become the other. **A study should therefore distinguish between residue that produces a standing procedure and residue that produces only the ability to force a crisis** — the first compounds, the second has to

be re-earned every time, and the difference between them is most of what people mean when they say a liberty is secure.

A note on sources. The exact quotations are from T. E. Bowdich, *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee* (London, 1819), digitised text: the whole text of the provisions law as promulgated and the manner of its enactment, including the announcement to the four members of the aristocracy, the crier's proclamation, the people's thanks and the crier's fees of ten ackies from the King and twenty from the people; Bowdich's own remark that the attachment of the penalty manifests some advancement in polity in securing the accused against arbitrary judgment; the risk to the accuser's life in treason charges and the reason his informants gave; the entertainment owed by a failed accuser; the reservation of capital punishment; the tributary subject's appeal claiming decision by the law of Ashantee; the right to clear bush without payment to the King as lord of the soil; the government's want of power to direct traders to a particular market; the suspension of law during the Yam Custom; the ladder of oaths and the gloomy silence at the top; the exemption of the founders' descendants from capital punishment, their number and condition in 1817; Osei Kwadwo's oath that his appointees' lives should be equally sacred; and the assembly of captains around 1799 insisting that the remaining aristocracy publicly disclaim their exemption. Bowdich's standing warnings apply: five months in Kumasi, interpreters throughout, an agent of a company negotiating for a power that would invade, and a summary of an unwritten legal system by a man who could only describe what he was shown or told. His report of the promulgation is first-hand — he says he was present — and is the strongest single piece of evidence in this module. The unresolved conflict between his account of the 1799 renunciation and his statement that four men still held the exemption in 1817 is left standing.

Modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited. The reconstruction of a substantial private commoner economy in nineteenth-century Asante, the widespread acquisition of slaves by commoner households, the individual transactions conducted without the sanction of lineage elders, and the analysis of the 1883 rising as a movement of export-producing commoners, rich and poor together, who sought to use chiefly authority rather than to overthrow chieftaincy, are Gareth Austin's, and his revision of Ivor Wilks's account of an organised commercial middle class is noted as a live disagreement in the field. The account of the 1883 destoolment — the commoners of the capital taking control of the town and confining the king, and senior functionaries entering the palace on 8 March to take him into custody and declare him destooled — follows the standard reference literature; the deposition of Kofi Kakari in September 1874 and

the *amanhene*'s objection that it was unconstitutional follow the recent work on the late Asante state.

The weakest material is the destoolment procedure itself. The detailed form — the removal of the sandals, the three bumps of the buttocks on the ground, the grounds including arbitrary punishment of citizens and corruption — comes from twentieth-century ethnography and from modern descriptions of a living institution, and projecting it back to the eighteenth century is an inference rather than a finding. What is documented for the period is Bowdich's account of the removal of Osei Kwame: the formal warning about the Yam Custom, the chief captains going to the queen mother, the recounting of offences, her request that her second son be raised, and the deposed king sent into the bush. That is used here and the ethnographic detail is not relied on. The valuation of a hundred and ten peredwans in sterling uses Bowdich's own conversion of a peredwan at about ten pounds currency and should be treated as an order of magnitude only. And the standing limitation of this study presses hard on a module about liberty: no Asante commoner's account of what he thought he was entitled to survives, and every protection above is known because a foreigner wrote it down or because people were observed to act as though it existed.

MODULE 10

The Road Shall Always Be Kept Open

Change and collapse — three popular actions that changed nothing, one elite fracture that changed everything, and a restoration granted by the men who had abolished it

The law this case is asked to test

The proposition to be tested is a hard one and it is worth stating in its unflattering form before the evidence. Violence made the arrangement. The common man's compliance was priced. The hierarchy defends the arrangement because each of its members defends his own position. It follows that structural change cannot come from peasants, slaves, porters or craftsmen, however many of them there are and however angry they are, because a functioning state apparatus defeats its own unarmed population with a regularity approaching a law. Change comes from the hierarchy's side: fracture, conquest by another hierarchy, or an apex so exhausted militarily or fiscally that it can no longer project force and must reprice what it takes. Popular energy may load the lever. It does not work it.

Asante is a good test because it offers, inside seventy years, one of each: a foreign conquest, a fiscal exhaustion, a five-year elite civil war, and — this is the part that makes the case worth running — **three separate occasions on which the common people of Asante acted, in numbers, with real grievance, and in one instance with complete tactical success.** If the proposition is going to fail anywhere, it should fail on one of those three.

It does not fail. But the case adds something the proposition does not contain, and the addition is the module's contribution.

1826, and the first crack that came from outside

Asante's first century after Feyiase records no serious internal challenge and no defeat. It also records something more telling: on 21 January 1824 an Asante army destroyed a British force at Nsamankow and killed the governor of the Gold Coast, Sir Charles MacCarthy, whose skull was carried to Kumasi. A state that kills a European governor in the field in the 1820s is not a state under any internal pressure worth the name.

The check, when it came, came from a coalition. At Katamanso, near Dodowa, on 7 August 1826, a combined force of the coastal states with British and Danish support

and, decisively, Congreve rockets, broke an Asante army in the field. The Asantehene escaped. In 1831 a treaty negotiated by George Maclean took the southern claims away and lodged hostages at Cape Coast.

Note what did the work and what did not. The people of the coastal states were not the agents of this; the coalition of their rulers was, backed by a European power with an artillery advantage. The one lasting internal consequence of Katamanso was a policy decision at the top: Kwaku Dua Panin, reigning from 1834, largely abandoned expansion and ran a long, deliberately quiet reign. An apex checked from outside repriced its own strategy. Nobody underneath it was consulted.

1874: what the burning actually cost

The decisive external event is the war of 1873–4, and the important thing about it is that the military outcome mattered far less than the fiscal one.

Wolseley's column reached Kumasi and burned it on 4 or 5 February 1874. The army withdrew almost immediately; there was no occupation, no garrison, no administration installed. In purely military terms Asante had lost a capital and a campaign, which it had survived before.

The treaty is what broke it. Signed at Fomena in the weeks after the burning — the date is given variously as 13 February and 13 or 14 March, and the discrepancy is not resolvable from the sources available to me — it imposed three things. An indemnity: *The King of Ashanti promises to pay the sum of 50,000 ounces of approved gold as indemnity for the expenses he has occasioned to her Majesty the Queen of England by the late war*, with a thousand ounces forthwith and the rest by instalments at British demand. The renunciation of allegiance from Denkyira, Assin, Akyem and Adansi, and of all claim to Elmina. And an obligation about a road: *The King of Ashanti guarantees that the road from Kumasi to the River Pra shall always be kept open*, with freedom of trade for all persons carrying merchandise in either direction.

That last clause is the conquest in miniature, and it is worth pausing on. This was a state whose entire information and revenue architecture rested on cutting a limited number of corridors through opaque forest and garrisoning them — long sight along fixed axes, purchased by controlling who walked where. The treaty required it to keep the principal southern corridor open and unobstructed to anyone. The apparatus that had made the country legible to Kumasi was, by a single article, converted into a channel Kumasi was forbidden to close.

Fifty thousand ounces was on the order of a million pounds at contemporary values, against a state whose recorded gold yields ran to a couple of thousand ounces a month at the richest pits in a good period. It was never going to be paid, and only a

fraction of it ever was. What the indemnity did was not to transfer wealth; it was to place the apex under a permanent obligation it could satisfy only by raising exactions on the interior at exactly the moment when the tributary provinces supplying the exactions were leaving.

The deposition that was an alibi

Within months the hierarchy removed its own king, and the grounds it chose are the sharpest single piece of evidence in this module.

In September 1874 the Kumasi *nsafohene* — the military officeholders of the capital — deposed Kofi Kakari. Two charges are recorded: his inept leadership during the war, and his sacrilegious raiding of the royal mausoleum at Bantama for gold.

Consider the second. Fifty-five years earlier Bowdich had written down the rule: the gold buried with the royal dead *is sacred; and cannot be used, but to redeem the capital from the hands of an enemy, or in extreme national distress; and even then, the King must avoid the sight of it.* The taboo was still constitutionally live in 1874 and it cost a sovereign his stool — which is a remarkable confirmation that the belief measured in Module 3 was load-bearing more than half a century on.

But look at the circumstances. The capital had just been burned by an enemy and an indemnity of fifty thousand ounces imposed. If Bowdich's statement of the rule was accurate, this was precisely the case in which the treasure could lawfully be spent. Either the exception had narrowed in the intervening decades, or the charge was a pretext, or both.

The position-logic reading is not difficult. The men who deposed Kofi Kakari for losing the war were the men who had commanded the army that lost it. They could not indict him on the ground that actually mattered without indicting themselves, so they indicted him on a religious offence that touched none of them. **A fractured elite prosecutes its apex on the charge that does not implicate the prosecutors, and the charge it selects identifies the faction doing the prosecuting.** That is a general result and it should be looked for elsewhere in the collection.

And immediately the fork that Module 8 identified opened, in the plainest possible terms: the *amanhene* declared the deposition unconstitutional, because it had been done without their approval. The Kumasi officers said they had removed a king who had failed the nation. The paramounts of the founding states said the officers had no standing to remove anybody. Both were defending the arrangement. They meant different arrangements.

The provinces leave

Then the empire came apart, and it came apart at the top of each piece.

Dwaben, whose stool had passed out of the Oyoko clan and whose chief had withheld his forces during the war, seceded; Mensa Bonsu broke its army in 1875 and its people migrated south to Akyem, founding New Dwaben at Koforidua under British protection, joined by towns from the surrounding district. Adansi went. Nkoranza, Gyaman and the Brong states went. Salaga, the great northern kola entrepôt, rebelled. The tributary renders from Gonja and Dagomba — the five hundred slaves and two hundred cattle a year from each large town — stopped.

Not one of these was a popular movement. Each was a ruler and his council calculating that the arrangement no longer paid, and each took his people with him because that is what a stool does. The empire's dissolution was performed entirely by officeholders exercising the discretion the settlement had always left them.

And alongside the secessions ran something quieter that the framework has not been scoring, and which this case forces into the account. People left. Not in revolt — in ones and twos and households and, at Dwaben, in tens of thousands. Slaves absconded southward to the Protectorate. Pawns absented themselves. Wealthy men removed themselves and their capital to British territory to get out from under the death duties. Nothing in the terrain had changed and nothing in Asante's internal arrangements had changed; what had changed was that there was now, for the first time in two centuries, somewhere to arrive.

This is the mechanism Module 5 identified in advance and it fires here exactly as predicted. **Where exit becomes available, a discontented population does not rise; it drains — and in a labour-scarce economy a drain is far more damaging than a revolt, because a revolt can be crushed and a drain cannot.** The Asante state's whole wealth was people. It was being deprived of them by a process against which it had no instrument at all: no border it could seal, no army it could send, no charge it could lay.

But the law survives the addition, and the reason matters. **Exit is downstream of elite action.** The draining population did not create the destination; a rival hierarchy created it, by establishing a protectorate on the coast. The peasant walked through a door. He did not cut it.

1883: the largest popular action in Asante history

Now the hardest case for the proposition, and it deserves to be stated at full strength before it is assessed.

Mensa Bonsu, on the stool from 1874, faced an impossible arithmetic: an indemnity, no tributary revenue, no southern trade routes, and a capital to rebuild. He did what the framework says an apex in that position does — he repriced, and pushed exactions and judicial fines to levels the interior had never borne. Attempts to depose him were made in 1877 and 1880 and failed. By 1882 he had lost the confidence of everyone outside a small palace circle and the rural districts were in a state of general disorder.

In early 1883 the commoners of Kumasi seized control of the capital and confined the Asantehene to his palace. On 8 March a number of his own senior functionaries entered the palace, took him into custody, declared him destooled and banished him from the city.

That is a popular action of the first order: unarmed townspeople successfully immobilising the head of the most formidable military state in West Africa. Gareth Austin's reconstruction is that this was not the organised commercial class of the older account but a broad movement of export-producing commoners, rich and poor together, reacting to punitive revenue measures — the political climax of the long adjustment to the ending of slave exports.

Now ask what changed.

The occupant of the stool changed. Nothing else did. Chieftaincy was untouched — Austin's finding is explicit that the commoners sought not to overthrow it but to use its authority to amplify their protest. No commoner body was created, no seat established, no procedure left behind that could be used again without another crisis. The destoolment itself was performed by officeholders. And the succession passed immediately out of the hands of everyone who had seized the town and into a five-year war between two elite factions.

The largest popular action in the order's history removed a man and altered not one structural feature of the arrangement. That is as clean a confirmation of the proposition as a case can supply, and it is worth noticing that the confirmation is *not* the usual one. This was not a rising that got massacred. It succeeded completely at what it attempted, and what it attempted was to change the personnel.

The fork opens: 1883–1888

What followed is the module's real answer to the question of how this order changed.

With Mensa Bonsu gone, the *nsafohene* moved to enstool a successor. The *amanhene* resisted, on the ground that overseeing the selection of an Asantehene was their function and the Kumasi officers were usurping it. Some argued for restoring Kofi

Kakari, on the ground that his deposition had been unconstitutional; others refused him because he had presided over the defeat; some called for Mensa Bonsu back; and Kwaku Dua Kumaa was advanced as heir-apparent. Fighting broke out in 1883. Kwaku Dua prevailed in 1884 and died of smallpox six weeks later. From 1885 the war ran on between the partisans of Agyeman Prempe and of Yaw Twereboanna, and it was, in the modern reading, among other things a straight contest between the Kumasi military officeholders and the paramount chiefs for control of the state. Ordinary Asante were conscripted by both sides and served as the infantry of a quarrel that was not theirs. Prempe secured victory in 1888.

Five years of internecine war, fought by two bodies of men each of whom believed himself the constitutional party. This is precisely the shape Module 8 predicted from the reform of the 1770s: an apex who builds a counter-elite acquires two constituencies that defend the arrangement out of self-interest, and they are defending different arrangements; the disagreement is invisible while he can pay both and becomes the war when he cannot. 1874 stopped the payments. The fork opened nine years later and took five years to close.

By the time it closed, there was no floor left. That is the point on which the whole of what follows turns.

1896: a conquest with no battle

Prempe I spent his reign from 1888 doing what a competent apex does after a civil war: reconciling provinces, restoring the centre's authority, and declining British offers of protection. He refused a protectorate; in 1895 he sent an embassy to London to negotiate directly, and it was refused a hearing.

In January 1896 a British expedition under Sir Francis Scott advanced on Kumasi. **There was no battle.** Prempe submitted rather than see the capital destroyed a second time, and was then arrested along with the queen mother Yaa Akyaa, his father, and a body of senior chiefs; he was taken to the coast, then to Sierra Leone, and in 1900 to the Seychelles, where he remained until 1924. The palace was looted and the mausoleum entered. A British fort was built at Kumasi.

An empire that had killed a British governor in the field seventy-two years earlier, and had beaten every neighbour it ever faced, was extinguished without an engagement. The reason is not that its people had stopped being willing to fight — 1900 proves otherwise. The reason is that the thing which fights was gone. The wings of the army belonged to the *amanhene*; the *amanhene* and the *nsafohene* had spent five years killing each other; the tributary provinces that had supplied the vanguard had

seceded; and the apex had been on the stool for eight years of reconstruction with an unpaid indemnity hanging over him.

A floor does not usually crack under the blow that finishes it. By 1896 the crack was twenty-two years old and the blow merely arrived. And what the British then did was the correct move against an order of this kind, whether or not they understood why: they removed officeholders. Module 7 established that this was a polity whose entire archive was performed rather than written and whose fiscal memory sat in a single man's head — an information system with excellent security and no redundancy. Deporting the king, the queen mother and the senior chiefs was not merely a decapitation of government. It was an attack on a memory system, and it worked as one.

1900: a rising led by a queen mother

The last act is the one everybody knows, and the detail that matters is usually left out.

Governor Frederic Hodgson arrived at Kumasi on 25 March 1900 and addressed the assembled chiefs. He told them Prempe would not return, that the indemnity was still unpaid, and then said this: *Where is the Golden Stool? I am the representative of the Paramount Power. Why have you relegated me to this ordinary chair? Why did you not take the opportunity of my coming to Kumasi to bring the Golden Stool for me to sit upon?*

Two things about that speech. The first is that Hodgson had understood the object's function correctly. He is recorded as believing that if he could get possession of the Golden Stool he would be able to govern the country for all time, and Joseph Chamberlain was questioned in Parliament about whether he had ever been authorised to demand it. Read against Module 3, Hodgson was structurally right: the stool was the instrument by which allegiance had been relocated out of Kumasi into a thing, and a power holding it would have held the thing every chief in Asante had sworn to. The second is that he had the grammar exactly inverted. Nobody sat on the Golden Stool. Not the Asantehene, who was enstooled beside it and lowered over it without contact. The one thing the object could not do was bear a man's weight, and the representative of the paramount power asked why it had not been brought for him to sit on.

A conqueror who correctly identifies the robe object and misreads its grammar produces the opposite of what he intends. Hodgson wanted a cheap and permanent legitimacy and got a war.

The rising that followed is remembered as the moment the Asante people rose, and it should be looked at carefully. Its leader was Yaa Asantewaa, and she was not a commoner. She was queen mother of Ejisu; she had exercised her constitutional right as

queen mother to nominate her own grandson as Ejisuhene; and when the British deported him along with Prempe in 1896 she became regent of the Ejisu-Juaben district. She was, in other words, a senior officeholder of the hierarchy, occupying a position that the British removal of the male officeholders had left her holding. The speech attributed to her — reproaching the chiefs for their fear, invoking the brave days of Osei Tutu and Opoku Ware, and declaring that if the men of Asante would not go forward the women would — comes down through tradition recorded long afterwards in several versions and cannot be treated as a transcript. What can be treated as fact is who she was.

An Asante taken prisoner afterwards, Kofi Kofia, gave the grievance in a sentence whose structure is worth noticing: there had been no plotting against the government, he said, until the governor came up and demanded the Golden Stool from the big men and money from all of us. Two demands, two constituencies. The stool from the officeholders; the money from everybody.

The war was substantial — the fort at Kumasi besieged, thousands of Asante casualties, over a thousand on the British side — and it was lost. Yaa Asantewaa was deported to the Seychelles in 1901 and died there in 1921. On 1 January 1902 Asante was annexed.

The rising changed nothing except the speed of the annexation, which is what the proposition predicts for a popular action against an intact external floor. But it did achieve one thing, and it is the only unambiguous popular victory in this study: **the Golden Stool was never surrendered.** A counterfeit was produced for the governor. The real one stayed hidden for twenty-one years, until road workers found it in 1921 and stripped its gold ornaments, and was restored in time to be used at the installation of Prempeh II in 1935. A whole population successfully concealed an object from a colonial administration for two decades. That is not structural change. It is something else, and Module 4 has already measured what it was.

1935: restored by the men who abolished it

The coda is the purest confirmation the case offers, and it is usually told as a happy ending rather than as evidence.

Prempe was allowed home in 1924 and recognised, at first, only as chief of Kumasi. In 1935 the British restored the Asante Confederacy and recognised Prempeh II as Asantehene, and the Golden Stool was used in his installation.

Nobody rose to obtain this. There was no rebellion, no campaign, no popular movement that forced it. The British restored the office because by the 1930s indirect rule had become the settled doctrine of colonial administration and governing Asante

through a recognised Asantehene was cheaper and more effective than governing it through district commissioners. The order was destroyed by a decision of a rival hierarchy and restored by a decision of the same rival hierarchy, on both occasions for that hierarchy's own reasons.

Even the restoration came from the elite side. If a reader wants one fact to carry away from this module, it should probably be that one.

Reading change against the framework

Four results.

The proposition holds, and it holds against the strongest test the case could offer. Asante's common people acted three times. In 1883 they succeeded completely at what they attempted — they took the capital and immobilised the sovereign — and what they attempted was the removal of a man; every structural feature of the arrangement survived, the destoolment was executed by officeholders, and the succession passed straight into a five-year war between elite factions. In 1900 they fought a real war and lost it. In 1935 they got their king back without doing anything at all. Meanwhile the changes that actually restructured the order were: a defeat by a foreign coalition in 1826, a foreign conquest and an unpayable indemnity in 1874, the secession of provincial rulers, a five-year civil war between two bodies of the hierarchy, a conquest in 1896 conducted without a battle, and a restoration granted by the conquerors in 1935. Every one of them was performed by people who held office and commanded force.

But the collection should add exit to the list of things that happen when an apex weakens, and should be careful about where it sits. After 1874 the Asante population did not rise; it drained — slaves and pawns absconding to the Protectorate, wealthy men removing their capital beyond the reach of the death duties, and at Dwaben an entire state walking south. In an order whose wealth was people rather than land, that was more corrosive than any revolt could have been, and the state had no instrument against it: no border to seal, no army to send, no charge to lay. **A drain cannot be crushed, which is exactly what makes it more dangerous to an order than a rising and less useful to the people doing it** — they take themselves out of the arrangement rather than changing it, and the arrangement is left standing, poorer. The law survives intact, because the destination was created by a rival hierarchy. Exit is a real mechanism of decay and it is downstream of elite action every time.

A fractured elite prosecutes its apex on the charge that does not implicate the prosecutors. The Kumasi officers who had commanded the army that lost the war deposed Kofi Kakari for sacrilege at the royal mausoleum, not for losing it. The charge

chosen is diagnostic: it identifies which faction is doing the removing, because it will always be the offence that lies outside that faction's own responsibility. Where a study finds an apex removed on a curiously ceremonial ground immediately after a military catastrophe, it should look for the men whose competence the ordinary ground would have questioned.

And a floor rarely cracks under the blow that finishes it. Asante fell without a battle in 1896 because the thing that fights had been consumed between 1874 and 1888 by a constitutional dispute the reform of the 1770s had made inevitable. The British arrived at a building that had already lost its frame. **The interval between the crack and the collapse is where the real explanation lives**, and a study that dates an order's end to the year of the last campaign will always attribute the fall to whoever happened to be standing there.

One honest qualification, because the proposition is worth nothing if it cannot carry it. Popular pressure did real causal work in this story. Mensa Bonsu's exactions failed because the interior would not bear them, and that refusal set the ceiling on what the apex could extract — which is what converted a fiscal problem into a constitutional crisis. The people were not decorative. They were the constraint that made the repricing impossible and therefore made the fracture necessary. What they were not, at any point in seventy years, was the party that chose the outcome, selected the successor, or altered a single term of the arrangement. The line between causal load and proximate agency is thin, and this case sits directly on it: the weight was theirs, the lever was not.

A note on sources. The exact quotations from the Treaty of Fomena — the fifty thousand ounces of approved gold as indemnity, and the guarantee that the road from Kumasi to the River Pra shall always be kept open — are from the treaty text as reproduced in the public record; the date of signature is given variously in the literature as 13 February and as 13 or 14 March 1874, and I cannot resolve it. The indemnity's contemporary sterling value of roughly a million pounds, and the fraction actually paid, are as reported in the secondary literature and should be treated as approximations. Governor Hodgson's address of 25 March 1900 is quoted from the text as it circulates in the historical literature; it derives from the colonial record rather than from a verbatim transcript, and small variations between versions exist. The statement of Kofi Kofia is quoted at second hand from the same literature. Bowdich's rule on the sacred gold at Bantama is from *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee* (London, 1819).

The speech attributed to Yaa Asantewaa is the weakest evidence in this module and is flagged as such on the page. It comes down through Asante oral tradition recorded well after the events, exists in several materially different versions, and cannot be

verified as her words. It is described here rather than relied upon. What is used instead is her documented position: queen mother of Ejisu, exerciser of the queen mother's right of nomination, and regent of the Ejisu-Juaben district after the British deported the officeholders in 1896.

Modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited. The deposition of Kofi Kakari by the Kumasi *nsafohene* on grounds of inept leadership and the sacrilegious raiding of the royal mausoleum, the *amanhene*'s objection that it was unconstitutional, their subsequent resistance to the officers' attempt to enstool a successor, and the character of the 1883–88 civil war as a contest between the two bodies, follow the recent Cambridge work on the military structures of the late Asante state. The analysis of the 1883 rising as a broad movement of export-producing commoners, rich and poor together, against punitive revenue measures, and the finding that they sought to use chiefly authority rather than overthrow chieftaincy, are Gareth Austin's, in explicit revision of Ivor Wilks's account of an organised commercial class; that disagreement is live and both positions are named. The sequence of secessions after 1874, the Dwaben migration to Koforidua, Prempe's election in 1888 and his refusal of protection, the 1895 embassy to London and its rejection, the 1896 submission and deportations, the 1900 campaign and the 1902 annexation, and the 1935 restoration of the Confederacy, follow the standard reference literature. The concealment of the Golden Stool, the substitution of a counterfeit, its discovery by road workers in 1921 and the stripping of its ornaments, and its use at the installation of Prempeh II in 1935, are as reported there and are not contested, though the details of the 1921 discovery vary between accounts.

The interpretation offered here of the sacrilege charge as an alibi is my inference from the position of the men who brought it and is presented as inference, not as a finding of the scholarship. The standing limitation of this study applies throughout: for the decisive events of 1874–1900 the record is overwhelmingly British and administrative, written by the power that was dismantling the order, and the Asante side survives chiefly in traditions collected afterwards by people the dismantling had shaped.

MODULE 11

Many, Moreover, Died

The grim accounting — what two centuries of this arrangement cost in sword, why the largest column is not battle, and why the metabolic note was never called at the end

What is being counted, and why the total will not close

An armed group took power in the forest around 1701, held it for two centuries, and was destroyed. This module asks what that cost, and it asks it in the two currencies the framework uses: the sword, meaning people killed by the arrangement's violence; and the metabolic note, meaning the deaths a population owes when coordination has lifted it above what the land would otherwise feed and the coordination fails.

Two warnings before the arithmetic.

The first is that no total is available and none will be offered. This order kept no records; its treasury sat in one man's memory and its archive was performed on drums. Every figure below comes from a foreign merchant, a foreign envoy, a foreign army or a modern reconstruction, and most of them are estimates made once, by a man who was in the country for a few months, about events he had not seen. A study that produces a confident number here would be manufacturing one.

The second is the framing's own point, and it applies to this case with unusual force. After enough time, people forget that violence made the arrangement. Asante did not wait for time. It **legislated** the forgetting in its first generation, making it a capital offence to tell a man's children where his people had been conquered from — and then, once a year, paraded the skulls of every king it had beaten from the founder to the reigning monarch, through a crowd, with the executioners clashing knives on the bone. The forgetting and the remembering were both state policy, aimed at different things: no individual might be marked as conquered, and no one might be unaware that conquest happened. That is the condition in which this accounting has to be attempted — an order that erased the particulars and advertised the aggregate.

The founding, and a figure that will not hold

The first entry is the largest single number in the record and it is almost certainly not true.

Bosman, writing at Elmina within months of Denkyira's destruction, passed on what he had heard: *The Negroes report, that in these two Battles above a hundred thousand Men were killed*, with thirty thousand more among the Akyem who came to Denkyira's aid. Reindorf, writing in 1895 from Gold Coast traditions, gives the same figures — which, since he cites Bosman elsewhere, is repetition rather than corroboration.

Set it against what is known. Asante's army at Feyiase is put by tradition at sixty thousand, itself an unverifiable figure; Denkyira's was probably comparable. A hundred thousand dead in two engagements would mean the near-total destruction of both forces plus a great deal else, in a war fought with muskets that were slow to load, in close forest, over ground where pursuit is difficult. It is not impossible as a figure for a whole campaign including the sack, the flight and what followed — Bosman describes the country as left desolate and the plunder taking fifteen days to carry off — but as a battlefield count it will not stand. It should be read as what it is: a coastal rumour of a very large slaughter, transmitted by a merchant who had not been there, which tells us the war was understood at the time to have been enormous and tells us nothing about how many people died in it.

Before Denkyira there were the four wars against Dormaa, Amakom, Tafo and Offinso, by which Kumasi absorbed its neighbours. Tafo, in Reindorf's account, lost a district of a hundred towns. No figures exist for any of them.

The wars of expansion

Between 1701 and about 1750 the order conquered most of the forest and a broad belt of savanna beyond it: Bono in the 1720s, Gyaman, Akyem, Akwamu, Wassa, Aowin, Sefwi, Gonja and Dagomba in the 1730s and 1740s, and a long series of suppressions after each. Then a century of recurrent campaigns against provinces that revolted, and against the coastal states, and against Britain.

For almost none of it is there a casualty figure worth writing down. What can be said with confidence is structural rather than numerical, and it comes from the founding arrangement: this was an army that drew no wage, equipped itself from the enemy's dead, and put the most recently conquered people in the van of the next campaign, where the casualties fell. So the expansion's dead were disproportionately not Asante. Each conquest supplied the infantry — and the losses — of the next.

One campaign has a number, and it is in the Asantehene's own mouth. Of the Gyaman war of 1818–19, Osei Bonsu told Dupuis: *I killed Dinkera, and took his gold, and brought more than 20,000 slaves to Coomassy.* Twenty thousand people brought to

a single city from a single war, which is the only figure in this study given by the man who did it.

What he says next is this module's title, and it is the most economical description of the arrangement's arithmetic that exists: *Some of these people being bad men, I washed my stool in their blood for the fetische. But then some were good people, and these I sold or gave to my captains: many, moreover, died, because this country does not grow too much corn like Sarem, and what can I do? Unless I kill or sell them, they will grow strong and kill my people.*

Three dispositions. Killed for the stool. Sold or distributed. Or dead of hunger, because the forest could not feed them. Hold the third; it is the key to the metabolic question and it comes back at the end of this module.

The people sold

Here is the column that dwarfs all the others, and the reason it is easy to miss is that its entries are not recorded as deaths at all. They are recorded as sales.

Asante's wars produced captives in numbers no forest economy could absorb. Those captives went two ways: south to the Atlantic and north to the Muslim savanna. The southern trade is the better documented. Over the eighteenth century the transatlantic database records embarkations of roughly 168,000 at Anomabo, 100,000 at Cape Coast and 86,000 at Elmina; totals for the Gold Coast across the whole span of the trade are generally put near a million. Asante's own share cannot be isolated from that — the ports served many suppliers and the records are of embarkation, not of origin — but Asante was the dominant power inland for most of the century in which those numbers were run up, and its wars were the largest single generator of captives in the region.

The northern trade ran alongside it and is worse recorded. Gonja and Dagomba owed, from each capital and each large town, five hundred slaves a year, with the smaller towns in proportion; they met the demand by raiding the stateless societies beyond them. Across the trans-Saharan routes generally the nineteenth-century volume ran at something like twenty thousand a year for the whole of Africa. What proportion of that originated in Asante's demand is unknown.

Now the point that this module exists to make about those figures.

A conquest state that sells people exports its death toll. The captives are not casualties in Asante's ledger; they are revenue. But a substantial fraction of them died — at capture, on the march to the coast, in the barracoons waiting for a ship, on the Middle Passage, and in the first year in the Americas — and every one of those deaths was produced by the transaction. They simply occurred elsewhere, later, and were

counted, if at all, by the buyers. Mortality on the Atlantic crossing alone ran at something over one in ten for most of the trade, and the losses between capture and embarkation are generally reckoned by historians to have been as high again or higher, though they are far less well evidenced.

This is why the sword column of a slaving state looks light and is not. The state's own battles killed perhaps tens of thousands over two centuries. The trade it fed killed a multiple of that, in places its officials never saw, at the hands of people it had sold to. Neither party kept a ledger that showed the whole. **An accounting that stops at the border of the polity will systematically understate an order whose principal export was human beings**, and the understatement is not marginal — it is most of the total.

The killings at the customs

The most notorious column is the one where the numbers are worst and the temptation strongest in both directions.

That people were killed at Asante state occasions is not in doubt and is attested by eyewitnesses with no need to invent it. Bowdich, present at the Odwira of September 1817, describes chiefs sacrificing a slave at each quarter of the town as they entered, slaves killed at the royal mausoleum over the great brass pan, and blood run into the hole from which the new yam was lifted — with the detail that those who could not afford a slave used the head of one already killed. Osei Bonsu told Dupuis, of his own captives, *I washed my stool in their blood for the fetische.* Rattray records that captives and criminals killed at funerals were not buried but cast into the forest.

Three things have to be held at once.

The scale was systematically inflated. Nineteenth-century British accounts of Asante are saturated with human sacrifice, and Clifford Williams's assessment of the sources for 1807–74 concluded that much of that writing was produced to satisfy an audience rather than to establish a fact — which is what one would expect of a literature contemporaneous with the case for invasion, and which the Treaty of Fomena's clause requiring the renunciation of the practice makes explicit as a war aim.

The category was partly a mistranslation. A significant proportion of those killed were *akyere* — persons already condemned to death by judicial process, held sometimes for years against the occasion when a death would be required. Whether an execution performed at a festival is a sacrifice or a capital punishment is a real question and the answer is probably both. It does not make anyone less dead. It does mean that some of what Europeans counted as ritual slaughter would, in their own countries, have been counted as the assize.

And there is an observational bias that cuts the other way and is worth naming, because it follows directly from what this study has already established. This was a state that concentrated its executions at festivals precisely so that they would be seen, and that advertised its generals by the manner in which they destroyed prisoners. Terror announced is what a floor uses when it cannot afford surveillance. An order that kills visibly and in batches will be over-counted by observers who see the batches; an order that kills continuously and privately will be under-counted by the same observers. Asante's visibility was policy, and the propaganda fed on the policy.

No aggregate is offered here. The particulars above are what the record will support, and anyone who gives you a number for Asante's ritual killings across two centuries has constructed it.

The wars with Britain, and the war with itself

The externally documented killing is the smallest column and the best evidenced, which is itself a fact about the sources.

At Nsamankow on 21 January 1824 an Asante army destroyed a British force and killed the governor of the Gold Coast. At Katamanso on 7 August 1826 a coalition of coastal states with British and Danish support broke an Asante army with the help of Congreve rockets. In 1873–4 Wolseley's column of some 2,500 British troops and several thousand West Indian and African soldiers fought its way to Kumasi, took the city, and drove its inhabitants — a British estimate of about forty thousand, which is very likely a swollen festival figure rather than a resident population — into the bush before demolishing the palace and burning much of the town. In 1896 there was no fighting at all. In 1900 the war of the Golden Stool cost the British something over a thousand casualties and the Asante several thousand dead.

Against these stands the episode with no figures whatever, which was almost certainly the largest single act of killing in Asante's history: the civil war of 1883 to 1888. Five years of internecine fighting between the Kumasi military officeholders and the paramount chiefs, with ordinary Asante conscripted by both sides and used as the infantry of a constitutional dispute. It is described in the scholarship as murderous, unforgiving and sustained. Nobody counted it, and nobody could — the state that would have counted was the thing being fought over.

That absence is itself the most eloquent entry in the ledger. **The one war this order fought against itself is the one for which no number exists**, because a state's capacity to count its dead is a function of the state, and this one had come apart.

The metabolic question, and the answer

Now the second currency, and the honest answer is that it does not apply. It is worth setting out why, because the reasoning is what makes the negative result useful rather than merely absent.

The metabolic debt arises where coordination and intensive agriculture lift a population above what the land would naturally carry — irrigation, terracing, drained fields, granaries, a bureaucracy moving grain, a dense urban population fed from a distance — so that the population comes to depend on the coordination itself for its food. When such an order is disrupted, the note is called: the works silt up, the grain stops moving, and the surplus population dies of hunger and of the diseases that follow hunger. That is the pattern in several of the studies in this collection, and the deaths it produces routinely exceed everything the sword did.

None of the preconditions existed here.

The agriculture was not intensive. It was shifting cultivation, with fallow periods of fifteen to twenty years outside the immediate environs of the capital — a system that works by moving rather than by improving, and that requires no coordination beyond a household. There was no irrigation, no terracing, no water management, no state granary system, no drained-field agriculture, and no crop that depended on maintained works.

The population was far below the land's ceiling, not above it. The first census thought to approach reality, in 1921, returned 406,640 people in colonial Asante at some seventeen to the square mile. The constraint on production throughout this study has been the opposite of the metabolic one: land was so abundant and labour so scarce that a dissatisfied man could clear a farm from standing forest and no one could stop him by owning the ground. An order in that condition has no population overhang, because there is nothing holding the population up.

And there is a clean natural test. In February 1874 a British army drove the entire population of the capital out of the city and burned it. In a metabolic-debt order — a city fed by a maintained supply system from a distance — that single act would have killed a very large number of people over the following year. There is no record of mass starvation in Asante after 1874. The reason is that the bush would feed them: they went out to farms and villages that were already there, in a country with more land than hands, and the food system they depended on was not a system at all but a distribution of households.

So: **no metabolic debt. It does not apply here, and manufacturing one would falsify the case.**

The inversion, and the debt that was paid in instalments

But the negative result opens onto something the framework should carry, because Asante stood in a relationship to its land that is the exact photographic negative of the metabolic one.

The metabolic model runs like this: coordination raises the ceiling, population rises to meet it, disruption kills the surplus. One catastrophic instalment, at the end.

Asante ran the opposite operation. **Its coordination did not lift the population toward the ceiling; it held the population below the ceiling by removing people, deliberately and at a profit.** The forest could have fed several times the number who lived in it. What limited the population was not food and not disease but export — the continuous removal of people, in tens of thousands, decade after decade, from a region whose land was never remotely full.

Patrick Manning's demographic reconstruction is the relevant measure and its findings are stark: the population of tropical Africa stagnated between 1700 and 1850 while that of West Africa fell substantially; the losses were not made up by compensating fertility; and because the Atlantic trade took chiefly men, an adult sex ratio developed across West and Central Africa at around three-quarters of the normal proportion of men to women. At the end of the seventeenth century, export rates from the Gold Coast and the Bight of Benin of five to six thousand a year were already sufficient, on his modelling, to produce regional population decline.

Read against the framework, that is a debt — but it is a debt with a completely different payment schedule. It was not called at the collapse; it was called continuously, in instalments, for two hundred years, as the running cost of the arrangement rather than its terminal cost. And a large part of it was paid in people who were never born rather than in people who died, which is why it does not appear as a famine, a plague or a mass grave anywhere in the record.

So the framework's grim accounting should distinguish two demographic relationships between a coordinated order and its land. In the first, coordination raises the ceiling and the population climbs to meet it; the note falls due in one instalment when the coordination fails, and it shows up as a famine in the collapse. In the second, coordination monetises people and holds the population below the ceiling by removing them; the note is paid continuously while the order runs, and it shows up as an absence in the census rather than as an event in the chronicle. **The first is loud and late. The second is quiet and constant, and it is much easier to miss** — which is why a study of an order like this one, looking for the catastrophe at the end and not finding it, may conclude that the demographic cost was low when in fact it was enormous and had already been paid.

The transport ceiling, which was real

One genuine carrying-capacity constraint did operate, and it is not the one the model looks for. Osei Bonsu named it himself: the twenty thousand captives brought to Kumasi from Gyaman, of whom *many, moreover, died, because this country does not grow too much corn like Sarem, and what can I do?*

Sarem is the savanna. The point he is making is that the forest, unlike the open country to the north, could not produce a surplus of grain — and, though he does not say this part, it could not move one. With no pack animals, no draught beasts and no navigable rivers, food travelled on human heads, and a head can carry a load about as far as it can be fed on the way. So the constraint in this country was never total carrying capacity, which was ample. It was **carrying capacity per unit of transport**: the forest could feed an indefinite number of people spread out, and could not feed a large number of people gathered in one place.

That single fact has run underneath this entire study without being named until now. It is why the army carried meal in a bag and lit no fires. It is why the state could not garrison a province. It is why Kumasi's resident population was modest and swelled only for the festivals. And it is why a victorious army with twenty thousand captives had, in the Asantehene's own account of it, three options — kill them, sell them, or watch them starve — and why the market to the south was not merely profitable but structurally necessary. A conquest state in that country could not keep what it won.

Reading the accounting against the framework

Four results.

The battle column is the smallest and the least important, and the corpus should stop treating it as the measure. Asante's engagements over two centuries killed some tens of thousands, on figures that mostly will not bear weight. The trade that its wars fed killed a large multiple of that. **A conquest state that sells people exports its death toll** — the dying happens on the march, in the barracoons, on the crossing and in the first year overseas, at the hands of the buyers, in places the selling state never saw and never had reason to count. An accounting that stops at the polity's border understates such an order by most of its total, and the understatement is structural rather than accidental: the deaths are recorded as revenue on one side and as wastage on the other, and no one keeps a ledger that shows both.

A state's capacity to count its own dead is a function of the state, so the worst episodes are systematically the least documented. Asante's best-evidenced casualties are those inflicted by and upon the British, because the British had clerks. Its worst

single episode — five years of civil war between two halves of its own hierarchy — has no number at all, because the apparatus that could have produced one was the object being fought over. Where a study finds a suspiciously well-documented external war and a vague internal one, it should assume the proportions run the other way.

Visibility is not volume. An order that concentrates executions at festivals so that they will be seen — which this one did, as policy, because terror announced is what a floor uses when it cannot afford surveillance — will be over-counted by observers who see the batches, and will be compared unfavourably with orders that kill continuously and privately. Asante's ritual killings were real, are attested by witnesses who had no reason to invent them, and were also the single most inflated element of the nineteenth-century literature, produced alongside a case for invasion that made their abolition a treaty clause. Both halves of that sentence are true, and a study that drops either half is doing propaganda in one direction or the other.

And where the metabolic note does not apply, the reason it does not apply is itself the finding. There was no coordination-dependent population overhang in Asante, no intensive agriculture, no maintained works, no dependent urbanism — and the proof is that the destruction of the capital in 1874 produced no famine, because the bush fed the people who were driven into it. But the same order stood in a demographic relationship to its land that was the metabolic one inverted: it held its population *below* the ceiling by selling people, and the debt that produced was paid continuously across two centuries rather than in one instalment at the end. **The first kind of debt appears in the chronicle as a catastrophe. The second appears in the census as an absence, and only if somebody thinks to look for it.** Asante's grim accounting is almost entirely of the second kind, which is why the order looks, at first inspection, to have cost far less than it did.

A note on sources. The exact quotations are from three public-domain works. Willem Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea* (1705 English edition of the 1704 Dutch): the report of above a hundred thousand killed in two battles, given by him explicitly as what the Negroes report and not as his own count, and repeated by Reindorf in 1895 in a way that indicates dependence on Bosman rather than independent testimony. Joseph Dupuis, *Journal of a Residence in Ashantee* (London, 1824): the whole of Osei Bonsu's account of the Gyaman captives — the more than twenty thousand brought to Kumasi, the washing of the stool, the sale and distribution, and *many, moreover, died, because this country does not grow too much corn like Sarem, and what can I do?* T. E. Bowdich, *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee* (London, 1819): the sacrifices described at the Odwira of 1817, including the substitution of an already-severed head by those who could not afford a slave. All three

men's standing warnings apply and are set out in the earlier modules of this study; Dupuis in particular was publishing a case against his own superiors and had an interest in the Asantehene appearing reasonable, which cuts against rather than for the passage used here.

Modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited. The eighteenth-century embarkation totals for Anomabo, Cape Coast and Elmina are from the transatlantic slave-trade database and are figures for those ports, not for Asante's supply, which cannot be separated out. The demographic argument — stagnation of tropical African population between 1700 and 1850, substantial decline in West Africa, the rejection of compensating fertility, the adult sex ratio at roughly three-quarters of normal, and the finding that Gold Coast and Bight of Benin export rates of five to six thousand a year were already sufficient to cause regional decline — is Patrick Manning's, and it is a modelled reconstruction built on back-projection from twentieth-century censuses rather than a count; it is contested in its particulars and is used here for its order of magnitude and its direction. The assessment that nineteenth-century European accounts of Asante human sacrifice were frequently written to satisfy an audience rather than to establish a fact is Clifford Williams's, in his study of the sources for 1807–74. The *akyere* as persons already under sentence, and the disposal of the bodies of those killed at funerals, follow R. S. Rattray. The 1921 census figure and the fifteen-to-twenty-year fallow are Gareth Austin's. The characterisation of the 1883–88 civil war as murderous and internecine, and the conscription of ordinary Asante by both sides, follows the recent Cambridge work on the late Asante state.

The weakest points are flagged in the body and repeated here. Bosman's hundred thousand is a rumour and is rejected as a battlefield figure while being retained as evidence of contemporary impression. The sixty thousand for the Asante army at Feyiase is tradition. The British estimate of forty thousand inhabitants driven out of Kumasi in 1874 is very likely a festival crowd rather than a resident population, and estimates of Kumasi's ordinary population vary by a factor of three across the sources. No figure whatever is offered for ritual killings, for the expansion wars, or for the civil war, because none can be supported. Middle Passage mortality is given as an order of magnitude from the standard literature; capture-to-embarkation mortality is acknowledged as poorly evidenced and no number is attached to it. And the standing limitation of this study applies to this module more than to any other: the people whose deaths are being counted here left no record of any kind, were forbidden by law to state where they had come from, and are known to us almost entirely through the accounts of the men who sold them and the men who bought them.

MODULE 12

Do Not the White Kings Act Like This?

Convergence and divergence — the question Osei Bonsu put to a British consul in 1820, the twelve African colonial studies it interrogates, and what is left of the colonial bend when the metropole is removed

The question, asked in 1820

In the spring of 1820 the Asantehene Osei Bonsu pressed the British consul at Kumasi for an explanation of why the King of England had stopped buying slaves. Dupuis, who admits he was at a loss for an argument, gave him nothing satisfactory. The king then set out his own position: that he did not go into the bush to catch men like a thief, that his ancestors never had, but that when he fought a king and killed him for insolence he necessarily took that king's gold, his slaves and his people. And then he turned the argument round and asked a question that this entire study has been, without saying so, an attempt to answer:

Do not the white kings act like this? Did they not, in former times, buy slaves from all the people? And he added the history as he understood it — that white men had come in great ships, and fought and killed many people, and taken the gold and the slaves back to the white country.

He was not being rhetorical and he was not, on the evidence assembled in this study, wrong. The question is the correct one and it is the reason this case was selected. This collection holds twelve African studies and every one of them, until now, has been a colony. That means the framework has spent twelve cases attributing features to *colonialism* with no control group — no African conquest state to set beside them that had no metropole, no settlers, no racial ideology, no distant taxpayer and no European anywhere in the chain of command. A pattern that appears in twelve colonies and nowhere else is a fact about colonies. A pattern that appears in twelve colonies and also in Asante is a fact about conquest, and the collection has had no way of telling the two apart.

So the organising question of this module is exact: **which features of the colonial African cases were colonial, and which were simply what a state on that ground did?**

The answer, worked through below, is that the division is very sharp and that the line does not run where one would expect. Almost every feature the corpus has been

calling colonial turns out to trace to a single variable, and that variable is not conquest, not race, not capitalism and not Europe. It is **having to answer to somebody who is not there.**

What Asante did that Britain also did

Start with the convergences, because they are more numerous and more uncomfortable than the corpus's language has allowed for.

Indirect rule. The Northern Nigeria study's central subject is a system in which conquered rulers were left in place, confirmed in their offices, made responsible for their own populations, supervised by a small number of resident officers, and required to render tribute — because destroying them and administering directly was unaffordable. Bowdich, in 1819, describing a system already a century old: the Asante government *conciliated those whom they subdued by continuing them in their governments, and checked them by exacting their frequent attendance at festivals, politically instituted*, with each subject state placed *under the immediate care of some Ashantee chief, generally resident in the capital, who seldom visited it but to receive the tribute from the native ruler, for whose conduct he was in a reasonable degree responsible.*

That is indirect rule, in its essentials, arrived at independently, on the same ground, by an African conquest state, for the same reason: a conqueror with more territory than administrative reach does not dismantle the machinery he has captured. **Indirect rule is not a British invention and not a colonial technique. It is the default solution to a universal problem, and Lugard's system and Osei Tutu's are the same system.**

The complexity variable, including its grimmest corollary. The corpus has established that a conqueror rules through an existing apparatus where one exists and forges or destroys where it does not — and the Northern Nigeria study added the harder finding that the variable predicts not merely who gets co-opted but *who gets killed*: the peoples with a state got preservation, the peoples without one got raided and shot.

Asante confirms both, in a case with no Europeans within two hundred miles of the decision. Gonja and Dagomba were organised Muslim states with their own rulers, their own law, their own religion and their own scribes. Asante conquered them and then left them almost entirely alone — their rulers retained, their religion never challenged, and their kings excused even from attending the national festival that every other subordinate in the empire was required at. Beyond them lay the small-scale, stateless societies of the northern Volta basin, and those peoples were hunted annually to fill the tribute the organised states owed.

The same rule, the same corollary, no Europeans. Which means the variable is not about European racial categories and not about what Europeans found legible. It is about what any conqueror can enter and operate, and it produces the same sorting of the living from the harvested regardless of who is holding the guns.

Assuming the chair. The Northern Nigeria study proposed a sixth item for the Menu: where the conquered order has solved its own problem through an *office* rather than a bloodline or a creed, the conqueror need not co-opt or forge — he sits in the incumbent's seat and runs the incumbent's mechanism unchanged. Asante did precisely this to Denkyira. It destroyed the apex, took the tribute network, took the position astride the roads, took the relationship with the coastal forts, took the craftsmen and the regalia, and then operated the machine. It even took the men: Anokye, on Reindorf's account, was a functionary who came over from Denkyira. **An independent African confirmation of a Menu item proposed from a British case is exactly what a control group is for.**

Terror as a substitute for policing, because a state that cannot watch everybody must make the occasions it acts unforgettable; **roads as surveillance**, because in opaque terrain visibility must be constructed; **the army made out of the conquered**, with the last-subdued in the van; **tribute assessed by what a province has**; **slavery**, on a very large scale, indigenous, pre-colonial, and — as Module 6 established — *deepened* rather than diminished by the closing of the export market. None of these is colonial. All of them are what a conquest state on that ground did.

What Britain did that Asante did not

Now the divergences, and they are as sharp as the convergences.

The legal fiction of the settlement. The corpus's colonial cases turn on an instrument: a declaration that occupied land was vacant, or that a grantee already possessed what he was being given, or that a collective holding was partible. Asante produced no instrument at all. There was no charter, no code, no schedule of estates, no document of any kind — not because writing was unavailable, since Muslim scribes served the court, but because there was nobody to show a document to. Its apex could state his title to a foreign envoy in one unlaundered sentence: *if I fight a king, and kill him when he is insolent, then certainly I must have his gold, and his slaves, and the people are mine too.*

Extraction sorted by caste. Every colonial case in this collection sorts its extraction by a legal category of person. Asante's was sorted by **endowment** — each province paying in whatever it had — and there was no caste in the assessment at all. There could not have been, in an order whose founding statute made it a capital offence to say

which people had been conquered. Caste-sorted extraction requires a durable legal category of person, which requires a register, which requires writing, which requires an administration that must render its categories legible to somebody.

Withheld formation. This is the sharpest divergence and the most instructive. The colonial bend predicts that formation is withheld from the majority, because forming them would mean admitting them. Asante did the opposite at its core and the same thing at its edge, and the difference between the two is the whole finding. At the core it formed the conquered aggressively and admitted them *by statute*, with full citizenship, office open on merit, and death for anyone who mentioned their origin. At the periphery — Gonja, Dagomba, the outer tributaries — it demanded tribute and homage and asked nothing whatever of their belief.

Why the difference? Because admitting a Denkyira captive's grandson to Asante cost nobody anything. There was no home constituency whose membership would be diluted, no metropolitan public whose politics would have to absorb him, no franchise he might one day claim. A colonial power withholds formation because the formed subject becomes a claimant on the metropole's own political community, and the metropole will not have him. **Withheld formation is therefore genuinely colonial — and specifically, it is a product of the metropole's domestic politics rather than of conquest.**

The seam split by distance, and the settler override, and a collapse decided abroad. Asante had a seam, but it ran inward, between the apex and its own coordinating class, and every instrument of concealment was aimed at men with retinues rather than at people with grievances. It had no settlers, took a flow extraction, and left its peasants free access to land. And its end was determined by a decision taken in London by people who had never seen it — which is precisely the colonial pattern arriving from outside rather than being generated within.

The variable underneath

Lay the two lists side by side and the division resolves into a single sentence.

Everything on the second list traces to the existence of a **metropole**: a distant constituency with its own politics, its own belief in its own lawfulness, its own settlers, its own taxpayers and its own ledger, to which the conquest must render an account. The legal fiction exists to satisfy an audience that believes in law. The caste-sorted extraction exists because the categories must be legible to an administration that will be audited. The withheld formation exists because the metropole's political community is a scarce good. The seam is split by distance because the audience is at the far end of the distance. The settler override exists because settlers vote at home. And the collapse

comes from the metropole's will emptying because the will was never local to begin with.

Remove the metropole and every one of those features vanishes. Nothing on the first list moves.

So the corpus's *colonial bend* is misnamed, or at least mis-derived. **It is not a bend produced by conquest. It is a bend produced by accountability** — by the fact that a colonial conqueror is a man acting at a distance on behalf of people who will read about it. That is why the framework's colonial predictions have held so well across twelve cases and why they fail entirely here: they are predictions about what a conquest looks like when somebody is watching from far away and has to be managed.

And the consequence to state plainly, because it is the opposite of comfortable: **a conquest that answers to nobody is not gentler. It is differently shaped.** Asante was not kinder for having no metropole. It was, on Module 11's accounting, the supplier of an export trade whose death toll it never had to count because the deaths occurred on somebody else's ships. What the absence of a metropole removed was not the violence but the paperwork — and, with the paperwork, the whole apparatus of self-explanation that the colonial cases are made of.

The bias this puts in the record, and in the reader

Which produces the most important methodological finding in this study, and it should be uncomfortable.

The features that make colonial rule *legible to us* — the statutes, the registers, the assessed schedules, the published Blue Books, the Command Papers, the annual reports, the racial categories, the parliamentary questions — are artefacts of accountability. They exist because somebody had to be told. Asante had none of them and was not thereby milder; it simply left no file.

The consequence is that **the historical record of colonialism is unusually rich precisely because colonialism had to explain itself, and the record of indigenous conquest is thin precisely because it did not.** The Northern Nigeria study can quote a High Commissioner's own sentence about the fugitive slaves he sent back, because he printed it in a Command Paper that Parliament bought for one and threepence. Asante's equivalent decisions were taken in a courtyard and are gone. This study has had to build twelve modules out of a Dutch slave-trader, two agents of an invading power, and a mission pastor writing under British rule after the conquest.

That asymmetry systematically biases every comparison anyone makes between colonial and indigenous conquest, and it biases it in one direction: toward finding the colonial one worse, because the colonial one is documented. A reader who

compares Lugard's Northern Nigeria with Osei Bonsu's Asante and concludes that the British order was more brutal may be measuring nothing but the survival rate of paper. The corpus should hold this permanently, and it should hold it in both directions — because the same asymmetry is also what allows a defender of empire to say that indigenous states were terrible, on the strength of accounts written by the men who invaded them.

What the case confirms, complicates, and refutes

Confirms. The floor laid first and the robe fitted after. The recursion, with dates: Asante overthrew Denkyira, which had overthrown Adanse, which lay over settlements occupied since the ninth century — no first innocent order, and Denkyira's own hegemony barely two generations old when it fell. *Elite Chaos*, with unusual clarity: three popular actions in seventy years, one of them completely successful at what it attempted, and not one structural change among them; the actual restructurings performed by foreign armies, seceding provincial rulers, and a five-year civil war between two halves of the hierarchy. The complexity variable and its grim corollary, in a case with no Europeans in the decision. Assuming the chair. And the revealed-preference test, returning a clean positive: a king who was heir to every private fortune in his kingdom and was nonetheless forbidden to touch the royal treasure a short walk from his palace, or even to look at it.

Complicates. Four things, each stated in earlier modules and worth collecting here.

The three settlement fictions are a function of the audience, not of conquest. Where the audience with recourse is a law-believing metropole, the fiction is legal and written. Where it is a body of armed peers, the fiction is ritual — an oath, a stool, a story of states that came together freely, with four conquered neighbours quietly inside the arrangement and unmentionable by law. And where the audience has no recourse at all, there is no fiction, only a statement of title.

Surveillance is the tell of a belief that never took — but read its direction. Asante's surveillance apparatus was real and elaborate, and it was aimed almost entirely at chiefs, provincial rulers and great men. Almost none of it restricted what a farmer knew, because a farmer's knowledge was not a risk. **The direction the censorship points identifies the party the apex actually fears, and it is not always the party being crushed.**

Formation without literacy is not weaker; it is less contestable and less durable. A text can be read alone, compared with an earlier copy, and quoted back at the institution that issued it. A performed archive has none of that exposure — and lives in trained

persons, which is why the British attack on this order took the form of deporting officeholders, and why it worked.

And exit is a property of the destination, not the terrain. Asante's subjects could walk into unpoliceable forest any day of their lives and almost none did, because a man who left became kinless in a region where every polity treated the unattached as capturable. When a differently-organised receiving structure consolidated on the coast, the population did not rise — it drained.

Refutes. Nothing outright. But it **bounds the colonial bend**, and bounding is the useful operation. The bend is a set of predictions about conquest-under-accountability. Applied to a conquest that answers to nobody, four of its five clauses fail, and the fifth — the reversed robe — survives only in a generalised form: the robe is cut for whoever could still say no, and in a colony that is the metropole and the army, while here it was the men with wings of the army under their command.

The revisions

Five, offered to the corpus to take or reject.

One. Rename the colonial bend the *accountability bend*, and re-derive it. Its predictive power comes from the presence of a distant constituency that must be rendered an account, not from conquest, race, capitalism or Europe. Every clause of it can be generated from that one fact, and none of it survives the fact's removal. This also makes the bend testable in places nobody has thought to look — any conquest with a demanding home audience should show it, and any conquest without one should not.

Two. Indirect rule leaves the colonial column entirely. It is the default response of any conqueror holding more ground than he can administer, it was practised in the Asante forest a century before Lugard was born, and its presence in a colonial case is evidence about administrative reach and nothing else. The corpus should stop reading it as a distinctively colonial signature.

Three. Where an apex lacks administrative reach into the village, look for a collective-liability rule. Asante had no police and made the matrilineage answerable for its members' debts and oaths, so that families performed continuous close-range enforcement out of self-protection. That is how an order with a weak apparatus, an open frontier and no garrisons achieves a very low rate of defection. The instrument should be looked for in every case where the reach is thin.

Four. An apex who builds a counter-elite duplicates the default rather than escaping it, and the duplication conceals a constitutional fork. Osei Kwadwo amalgamated stools, installed his favourites, made new offices heritable outside the clan system, and swore his creatures' lives as sacred as the old nobility's *to anticipate any*

doubts of his fidelity to the constitution. That produced two bodies of men each defending the arrangement out of self-interest — which is double the stability while the money lasts, and a civil war between two sets of loyalists when it stops. **Look for the fork at the moment of the reform, not at the moment it opens; the interval can be a century.**

Five, and it belongs to the grim accounting. There are two demographic relationships between a coordinated order and its land, not one. In the familiar case, coordination raises the ceiling, population climbs to meet it, and the metabolic note falls due in a single instalment when the coordination fails. In the case Asante presents, coordination *monetises* people and holds the population below the ceiling by removing them; the note is paid continuously across the whole life of the order, largely in people never born, and it appears as an absence in the census rather than as a famine in the chronicle. **The first is loud and late; the second is quiet and constant, and a study looking for the catastrophe at the end will conclude the cost was low when it was enormous and already settled.**

The strongest counter-position

Now the case against everything above, at full strength, in its own voice.

Look at your sources. A Dutch slave-trading company's chief merchant at Elmina. Two British agents sent by a company and a government that would invade the country they were describing. A Basel Mission pastor writing in 1895, under British rule, on the eve of annexation, from the traditions of peoples Asante had repeatedly invaded. Not one Asante voice, in Asante, uncoerced, in the whole apparatus — because the order kept its records in drums and stools and the drums were silenced by the men who wrote your footnotes.

You have then taken a framework built out of European colonial cases, applied it to that material, found that it fits, and announced the fit as a discovery. It is not a discovery. It is what happens when a European lens is applied to African evidence collected by Europeans. Your convergences are the convergences of your instrument.

And there is a worse charge. You have written twelve modules on the conquests, the extractions, the ritual killings and the slave-trading of an African state, at a moment when its regalia sits in a museum in London. Every finding you have produced is available tomorrow as an alibi. They were conquerors too. They kept slaves. They killed at their festivals. Lugard made exactly this argument: he counted seventeen conquests before him in a report to the Secretary of State and concluded that he saw no injustice in being the eighteenth. Your recursion doctrine — no first innocent order — is Lugard's argument with a bibliography.

And the honest counter-position is not that Asante was innocent. It is this. Asante was a functioning, sophisticated, self-governing state with a developed jurisprudence, a graduated law of oaths, an appellate system that let a provincial subject go over his own ruler's head, a rule of law with penalties attached that a British visitor compared favourably to a Greek lawgiver's, a constitutional mechanism that removed three sovereigns in a century, an administration that maintained eight highways and a treasury without writing, and an army that beat every neighbour it met and killed a British governor in the field in 1824. It did not fall because its legitimacy had exhausted itself. In 1888 Prempe won a civil war and spent eight years rebuilding. In 1896 an industrial power that wanted the gold and the trade routes marched on Kumasi; the king submitted without a fight to spare his capital; and he was arrested anyway, with his mother and his father and his chiefs, and deported for twenty-eight years, and his palace looted and his ancestors' tomb entered. Four years later a governor demanded that his people hand over the object in which they believed their nation's soul was lodged, so that he could sit on it.

The order did not end because it had failed. It ended because it was shot. Everything else in your twelve modules is context for that sentence, and you have arranged the context so that the sentence arrives last and quietest.

The answer

Concede first, and concede all of it that is true.

The sources are exactly what the charge says they are, every module has said so on its own face, and the limitation is not cosmetic — it is structural and unfixable. An order that made it a capital offence to state where a man's people came from, and that kept its history in the mouths of officeholders the conquest removed, cannot be recovered on its own terms. This study is a reconstruction from hostile and interested witnesses, and the reader should discount it accordingly and permanently.

And the second concession is larger. **Asante was destroyed while functioning.** There is no reading of 1896 in which the order fell because it had lost the belief of its people, exhausted its own legitimacy, or ceased to be able to govern. It had come through a civil war, reconciled most of its provinces, and was eight years into a reconstruction under a competent apex. What arrived was an expedition. The state's own subjects demonstrated four years later, at real cost and against hopeless odds, what they thought of the arrangement that replaced it.

But three moves in the counter-position have to be refused, and they are refused on evidence rather than on sentiment.

The recursion is not Lugard's argument; it is the removal of Lugard's argument. He used the seventeen prior conquests of Hausaland to conclude that his own was therefore permitted — everyone does it, so it is allowed. The framework uses the same premise to reach the opposite conclusion: everyone does it, so *nobody gets to claim they did not*. A doctrine holding that there is no first innocent order takes the alibi away from every conqueror in the sequence, and the man it costs most is the last one to arrive, because he is the one still holding the goods. Lugard's inference required the recursion to *end* with him. The framework's inference is that it never ends with anybody.

The convergences are not artefacts of the instrument, and the specific reason is that the divergences are just as sharp. An instrument that manufactured its own confirmations would have found the colonial bend in Asante. It did not: four of the bend's five clauses failed, the legal fiction was absent, the caste-sorting was absent, the withheld formation ran backwards, and the seam pointed the other way. A lens that returns clean negatives on the features it was built from is doing something other than reflecting itself. What survived the transfer — the floor before the robe, the recursion, the default, the complexity variable, elite-driven change — survived because it is about how organised violence and belief work, and the hardware that runs both has not changed in fifty thousand years.

And the "they did it too" alibi fails on a specific, measurable asymmetry that this study can name. Asante's conquests were absorbed. Its founding statute made the conquered citizens and made their origins a capital secret; within two or three generations a Tafo or Denkyira or northern-born descendant was Asante, indistinguishable, and eligible for any office in the state. Britain's conquest was permanent and the category was permanent, because a metropole cannot dissolve a boundary that its own political community depends on. That is not a moral ranking and it is not offered as one — the absorption was compulsory, enforced by execution, and adopted because the state could not garrison what it took. It is a structural difference, it is predicted by the metropole variable, and it means the two conquests are not interchangeable items in a ledger even when both are conquests.

And then the discipline requires the thing that will not flatten, so here it is. **The counter-position does not lose.** It survives in this form, and this form is true:

Every structural finding in this study is available for misuse, and there is no way to write it that closes that door. A study that shows an African state conquering, enslaving, extracting and killing, at the moment its looted regalia is on loan from a museum in London, has put an argument into the world that it cannot control. The only honest answers are that the alternative — writing an African order as a state

without a floor, a robe, an extraction or a body count, unlike every other order in this collection — would be a different and worse dishonesty, the kind that treats a people as too fragile to be described; and that the framework's actual conclusion cuts against the misuse rather than for it, because it removes the innocence of the *last* conqueror as thoroughly as it removes the innocence of the first.

So what this study insists on is narrow, and it is this. Osei Bonsu's question was a good question and the answer to it is yes: the white kings did act like this, and the difference between them and him was not in kind. But the answer does not run the way either party would want it to. It does not acquit Britain, because a shared method is not a licence. And it does not acquit Asante, because being conquered later does not unmake what was done earlier — the tribute of five hundred people a year from each large town of Gonja and Dagomba, the annual hunt beyond them among peoples who were never subjects and were owed nothing, the twenty thousand captives whose disposal the Asantehene described in three clauses to a foreign envoy.

Both columns stand. The arithmetic is laid out and the sum is left to the reader, which is the whole of what this collection has ever claimed to do.

One last structural observation, offered as a finding rather than a flourish, because it belongs to the study's own subject. Britain took the king, the queen mother, the chiefs, the palace and the tomb, and never got the Golden Stool. It was hidden in 1896 and stayed hidden through the war of 1900, and a counterfeit was handed to the governor who had asked to sit on it. It surfaced in 1921, found by men repairing a road, who stripped its ornaments; it was restored, and it was used in 1935 at the installation of Prempeh II, in the office the same empire had abolished and then found it cheaper to recreate. Whatever Module 3 established about the manner of that object's making — and the earliest surviving account of its origin is an account of manufacture — the thing that was built outlasted the empire that came to take it, and there is an Asantehene in Kumasi this morning.

That is not a moral. It is the framework's oldest proposition, arriving for once in the reader's own century: **that the origin was built does not make the belief a lie; it makes it a thing that was built and then became real.** And a thing that has become real is harder to remove than a government, because a government can be deported and a stool can be buried in a forest for twenty-one years and dug up again.

A note on sources. Osei Bonsu's question — *Do not the white kings act like this?* — and the surrounding passage on the slave trade are from Joseph Dupuis, *Journal of a Residence in Ashantee* (London, 1824), quoted as in Module 6, with the warnings there stated: Dupuis was British consul at Kumasi, was publishing a case against his own superiors, and recorded the exchange through an interpreter. T. E. Bowdich's account

of subdued rulers continued in their governments and checked by compulsory festival attendance, and of each subject state placed under a resident Kumasi chief responsible for its ruler's conduct, is from *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee* (London, 1819), as in Module 2. Osei Kwadwo's oath *to anticipate any doubts of his fidelity to the constitution* is Bowdich's, as in Module 8.

The comparative material is drawn from the other studies in this collection and from the framework papers, chiefly *Elite Chaos*, *The Machine That Runs Itself*, *The Architect and the Inheritor*, *The Exploit*, *Position Logic* and the Field Manual. **Where this module characterises those studies' findings it is reporting them, not re-deriving them.** The complexity variable, the settler override, the sixth Menu item *assume the chair*, the proposition that the complexity variable predicts who gets killed, and Lugard's own count of seventeen prior conquests of Hausaland, are the British Northern Nigeria study's; the *kipande* register and the reading of surveillance as the tell of a failed belief are the British Kenya study's; the account of a conquest that had to be negotiated rather than imposed, and of authority as contract rather than throne, is the Italian Somalia study's; the account of a metropole publishing what it did because no constituency would act on it is Northern Nigeria's. The reading of Saint-Domingue as a fracture originating in Paris is that study's and is used here only by reference.

The central claim of this module — that the corpus's colonial bend is better understood as an accountability bend, generated by the presence of a distant constituency to which an account must be rendered — is **this study's own, and is offered as a hypothesis rather than a finding.** It rests on a single control case. One case is not a test. It should be attacked with the cases that would break it: an indigenous conquest with an elaborate written settlement fiction and no external audience, or a colony with a genuinely indifferent metropole that nonetheless produced the full apparatus of caste-sorted extraction and withheld formation. If such cases exist the proposition should be discarded without regret. Its most useful property is that it is easy to falsify.

And the standing limitation of this study is restated here because this is the module in which it bites hardest. Every conclusion above is built from Willem Bosman, chief merchant of a Dutch slaving company; from T. E. Bowdich and Joseph Dupuis, agents of a power that invaded the country they described; and from Carl Christian Reindorf, a Gold Coast African writing under British rule from the traditions of peoples Asante had repeatedly invaded. The Asante state kept its records in drums, stools, oaths and the trained memories of officeholders, and the officeholders were deported. What has been reconstructed here is what an order looked like from outside it. The reader should

hold that against every sentence of the preceding twelve modules, and should hold it hardest against the ones that were most useful.